

Keeping an eco-friendly eye on Tramore

The Tramore Eco Group is striving to heighten awareness about the beauty and diversity of Tramore's ecological environment

MEMBERS of Tramore Eco Group have made a significant contribution to promoting and preserving their local environment since the group was established. Its aim is to heighten awareness about the beauty and diversity of Tramore's ecological environment and to highlight how even the "small things" can contribute to saving the planet. Secretary Mollie Hunt explained that the idea for the group formed when she was walking with Afra Cronin on what is now known as Tramore Nature Park. "The larks were springing up around us. We were talking about how to stop dogs disturbing the birds and generally about how to help the environment," she explained.

"We decided the only way to do this was to form a group and do something about the things concerning us." Afra added: "I think we were always environmentalists. I was always aware of wasting water, even when I was a young woman with four children."

Around 10-14 people are now involved with the Tramore Eco Group, with everyone bringing their own unique skills and abilities. Chairperson Ann Kirby Nolan says the common denominator is that all the members have a great interest in the environment and are all "on the same page". "We all get on very well together and seem to get a lot done," she said. "It's lovely to be able to tick the boxes and move onto the next job."

Members had been attending walking tours with Denis Cullen who is involved with the Waterford branch of Irish Wildlife Trust. He is now also a member of the Tramore Eco Group and, with his qualification in ecology, brings a wealth of environmental expertise.

Within the past six months, some new members have joined the group. "It's a lovely group," says Ann. "Everyone is full of ideas and willing to turn up. Everyone wants to help the environment and do their bit."

The Tramore Eco Group has already made significant progress and members have embarked on a number of innovative projects. Bird and bat boxes have been placed in Newtown Woods and the Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens. Experimental seedbeds have been put in place in the Tramore Nature Park. The use of biodegradable dog poop bags, as opposed to plastic bags, is also being encouraged throughout the town. The group's members have held environmental walks at the Backstrand; staged a hugely successful 'bat night' at the Japanese Gardens; and a tree identification workshop on the Waterford Greenway. It's hoped that informative talks will be staged by the group once a month.

Treasurer Afra Cronin explained that the members are trying to encourage Tramore people to have a 'bee friendly garden' and to grow celandines and dandelions which bees are attracted to. The overall aim is to establish a 'bee corridor' around Tramore. The group has also enthusiastically spread the message of the Refill Ireland initiative which is a voluntary environmental project leading the way to make Ireland a tap water refilling country once again. Local businesses in the town which have joined the campaign are proudly displaying the Refill sticker at their premises. More than 90 local businesses have signed up and pledged their support to the campaign so far.

Ann says that Tramore is leading the way with this initiative outside of Dublin. Generally, she has noted a change in attitude and says many people are keen to follow the progress of the group and regularly interact through the group's Facebook page. "The timing is right. People want to do their bit and they are making small changes," she said. Recently, Waterford City & County Council obtained funding to upgrade the track in the Tramore Nature Park and to install bird watching facilities which is a source of great delight to all in the group. Another exciting project involves the development of innovative bins specifically designed for the disposal of plastic bottles. One has already been placed on The Prom and there are plans to introduce additional bins during the coming months.

Tramore is now leading the way with this initiative. "There has been huge interest," explained Ann. "People have contacted us from all over the country." Members of Tramore Eco Group visited the Seal Sanctuary in Wexford and brought a supply of Eco Bricks to help build their 40 metre long wall from plastic bottles filled with soft plastic. The Tramore Eco Group is also taking inspiration from an initiative in Mayo which has seen swift boxes placed in many different buildings. They are working with Dungarven Eco Group and Swift Conservation Ireland in protecting swifts that are in decline. Swift boxes were installed when renovations were taking place at the old railway station in the town and members of the group hope to install more throughout the town. All associated with the Tramore Eco Group are encouraging local people to get involved with their activities and are reaching out to all age groups.

They have linked up with local schools and groups and have been heartened by the enthusiasm which has been displayed.

Students have worked on specific environmental projects and have clearly shown their interest and desire in helping the local environment. "We're keen to work with the schoolchildren as we realise they are the next generation," explained Ann. "The teachers are absolutely fantastic and are very much aware of environmental issues." She says all in the Tramore Eco Group are passionate about highlighting that Tramore is a "beautiful coastal town which is worth minding".