

Lough Melvin – invasive species risk reduction.





Lough Melvin – a unique ecosystem

- Rossinver Fishery – owners of the southwestern portion of the lough.
- “One of the few remaining natural post-glacial salmonid lakes in northwestern Europe.”
- Cross-border system - Fermanagh, Leitrim and Donegal.
- Range of designations – Special Area of Conservation (N & S), Area of Special Scientific Interest (N).

Lough Melvin – a unique ecosystem

- Three species/ races of trout found in Lough Melvin – pioneering work undertaken by Prof A Ferguson (QUB).
- Gillaroo, Sonaghan, and Ferox.
- L Melvin also supports a population of Arctic char and Atlantic salmon.



The three species of trout found in Lough Melvin, Ireland. Top-gillaroo, middle-sonaghan, bottom-ferox. © A. Ferguson.



Lough Melvin – a unique ecosystem, in trouble....

1. Water quality decline: eutrophication -
Agricultural intensification/ forestry/ wastewater.
2. Introduction of invasive non-native species.
 - Perch, roach, rudd, bream...
 - Canadian pondweed, American mink, Himalayan Balsam, Japanese knotweed...

Lough Melvin – a unique ecosystem, in trouble....

- **Quagga mussel – confirmation in Lower Lough Erne in late 2025.**
- Potentially a major threat to Lough Melvin.
- Proximity to Lower Lough Erne and volume of boat traffic between the two loughs.
- Perceived lack of action from official bodies?
- An urgent grassroots initiative was initiated...

Vigilance urged after invasive mussel found in Fermanagh

Monday, 15 Dec 2025 18:37



Quagga mussel is native to the Dneiper river drainage of Ukraine and the Caspian sea

Concern for NI waterways as invasive mussel detected



CROSS

usually the size of a thumbnail but they breed in very large numbers and so they spread quickly

species of mussel which can cause extensive environmental damage has been detected in Northern Ireland for the first

NIERA urges greater vigilance as Quagga mussel confirmed in Lower Lough Erne – first confirmed record in Northern Ireland

Date published: 15 December 2025

The first confirmed case of the highly invasive Quagga Mussel in Northern Ireland has been reported in Lower Lough Erne.

Lough Melvin – a unique ecosystem, in trouble....

- **Angling related activity main risk of spread (boat launch).**
- The 2 fishery owners and the 3 local angling clubs met in February 2026 (before the main angling season starts).
- Agreed a joint approach to attempt to prevent spread to Lough Melvin.
- Will it work?

DANGER OF QUAGGA MUSSEL

KEEP THIS INVASIVE SPECIES OUT OF LOUGH MELVIN.



- Quagga mussel is a threat to the unique ecosystem of Lough Melvin including the 3 species of trout (sonaghan, gillaroo and ferox), Atlantic salmon and Arctic char.
- The main risk of Quagga mussel reaching the lough comes from boats, trailers and fishing equipment spreading the adult mussels (or the larvae) from infested waters, particularly Lough Erne but potentially any other waterbody.

HOW TO STOP QUAGGA MUSSEL

- 1. CHECK/ CLEAN** - thoroughly inspect boats/ trailers/ outboard engines for the presence of mussels, cleaning all equipment with a power washer or steam cleaning.
- 2. DRAIN** - remove all water from the boat via the bung (away from drains/ streams) and flush/ drain the cooling system of outboard engines.
- 3. DRY** - completely **DRY** the boat, trailer & all equipment, including waders, lifejackets, coats, landing nets etc.

ANY BOATS LAUNCHED ON LOUGH MELVIN MUST HAVE BEEN DRIED OUT OF WATER FOR A MINIMUM OF 5 DAYS – NO EXCEPTIONS.

It only takes one careless person to ruin Lough Melvin for everyone – let us all do our part to protect this special place.

Issued by Rossinver Melvin Angling Club, Garrison Lough Melvin Angling Association, Kinlough & District Anglers Association, Drowes Fishery and Rossinver Fishery

Lough Erne Wildfowlers' Council - community-led conservation.





What is the LEWC ?

- Formed in 1990 in response to changes in the management of wildfowling on Lough Erne.
- Membership is comprised of approximately 300 active wildfowlers.
(8 local wildfowling clubs in Fermanagh).
- Long standing conservation activities around Upper and Lower Lough Erne (pioneered use of duck nest tunnels in Ireland).

Boa Island Breeding Wader Project

- Envisioned and led by Lough Erne Wildfowlers' Council.
- Building on previous conservation activities.
- Desire to help address breeding wader decline locally.





Boa Island Breeding Wader Project

- Site selection- Boa Island
- Unique location.
- Local farming community aware of breeding wader species declines, but still some remaining.
- Innovative project involving a range of partners.
- Grassroots project – not led by external NGO etc.



Why the declines?

- **Complex - land use change is key.**

- Intensification of grassland management.
- Forestry in the uplands.
- Scrub encroachment on foreshore.

- Increased predation – not enough young birds fledging.
- Climate change.

BOA ISLAND PROJECT addresses HABITAT AND PREDATION issues.



Boa Island Breeding Wader Project

- Scientific advice from *Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust*.
- Habitat issues- scrub encroachment.
- Disappearance of waders from key sites.
- Likely low productivity for remaining pairs.
- Need funding to address the issues...



Boa Island Breeding Wader Project

- Independent monitoring from the outset- *Sterna Environmental*.
- 5 sites across Boa Island – all on active farmland.
- 4 key target species... lapwing, curlew, redshank and snipe.
- Common sandpiper - an honorary fifth!





Predator management

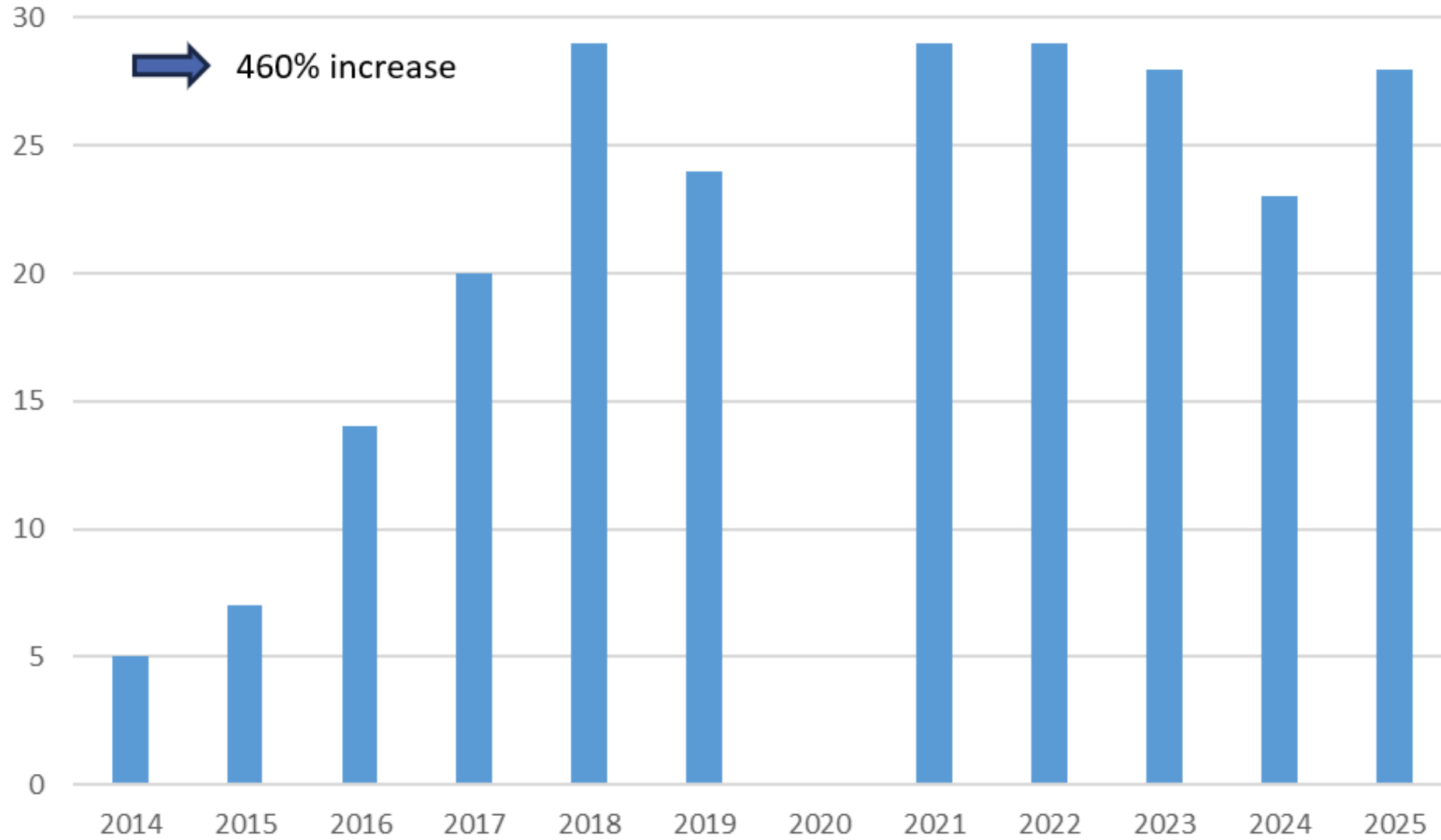
- Predation management – corvids, American mink and fox.
- How? Best practice, targeted seasonal control.
Mainly professional with some volunteer support.
- Methods – mink rafts, multi-catch crow traps and thermal imaging.

Mink raft (Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust).

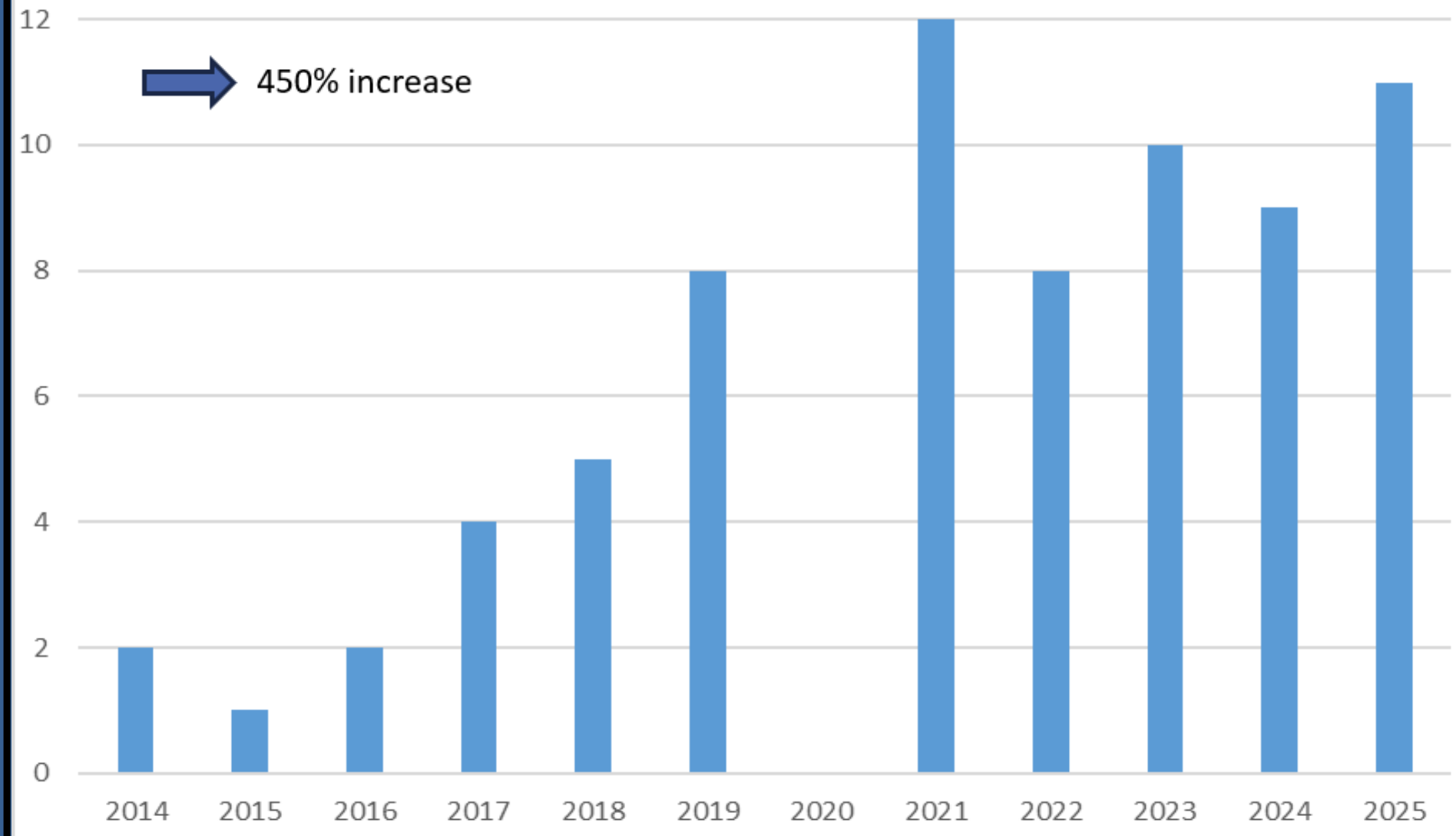
- LEWC have been using them for more than a decade.
- Can be used to track the presence (or absence) of mink.
- Forms very attractive platform for mink capture.
- By-catch reduction.



Snipe territories Brockagh All Count Sections 2014-2025



Common Sandpiper territories Brockagh All Count Sections 2014-2025



Community-led conservation

Engagement with:

- Local community
- School groups
- Snipe walks
- Local Government



Community-led conservation

- Challenges/opportunities.
- Socially embedded – not suddenly appearing from afar.
- Understanding the possibilities & limitations.
- Benefits for farmers – agri-environment schemes?



The future

- A work in progress.
- Ongoing management of existing sites.
- Project expansion.
- Support community-led conservation elsewhere...







Boa Island Breeding Wader Project

- Thanks to the funders and farmers
- Email: Michael@erne-environmental.com

