

## Wildlife & Habitats of Connemara School Photography Competition 2016 St. Paul's Secondary School, Oughterard, County Galway, Ireland

Roadbridge Ltd.

**BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category:** Community Engagement

### Project overview

This project was run over a two-month period at a local school (St. Paul's Secondary School, Oughterard). The primary objective of this photography competition was to connect local children with nature by asking children to capture images of what biodiversity means to them. It was also about showing them the fun that can be found in nature; and inspiring them to learn more, see more and do more. The added enticement of prizes also encouraged them to get out and about when the weather **wasn't** as favourable.

On the advice of the teaching staff the competition was limited to the junior cycle students. This represented approximately 100 children between the ages of 13 and 15 years. In all we received over 44 submissions. The overall winner was announced at a prize giving ceremony held at the school.

The total cost for running the competition amounted to €650 which included prizes, printing and framing.

### Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

There were no client specified obligations for Roadbridge to carry out this community engagement work. However, in all the construction projects that Roadbridge undertake there is a company CSR commitment to protect and where possible enhance the local environment and to work with the local community groups on projects that help raise awareness of biodiversity. The idea for this project arose from an internal staff meeting after the environmental manager had met with the school principle to discuss environmental awareness within the school.



*Display board at prize giving ceremony*

### What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The objective of this project was to make children aware of both the wonder and sensitivity of biodiversity that exists within their locality and the importance of getting out amongst nature. This project focused on the beauty of nature that exists outside the school gate.

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

Through the execution of this project we encouraged a large group of teenage children to explore the local environment in a quest to capture an image of nature that would impress the judging panel. The photos we received reflected a wide variety of flora and fauna during the winter months. The need for a caption to accompany each photo submitted meant each student had to explain what aspect of nature they were capturing in their photograph.

A specialist ecologist with a background in natural photography was organized by Roadbridge to deliver a presentation to the local secondary school. During the presentation it was stressed to all students that biodiversity encompasses everything we associate with nature. Also during the presentation, the children shared with us some very interesting points of view of what they felt biodiversity was and what it meant to them.

We feel that this project was innovative as it encouraged young students to actively engage with the environment in a manner which they may not have done so if we had simply chosen to give a classroom school presentation only. This project motivated teenagers to go out during the winter months and explore nature after school hours and on the weekends when they may not have ventured out otherwise.

We feel by instilling a sense of respect of the natural environment in the young members of the local community they will hopefully share this appreciation with their family and friends. Lots of students said to us that they took the photographs while out for walks with their friends or families.

The feedback we received from the students and teachers alike makes us feel that this project was a success and Roadbridge will certainly consider rolling out this photographic competition in the future at different site locations throughout Ireland and the UK.



*Roadbridge Environmental Manager Presenting School Principle with A Go-Pro Camera.*

## How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement

### Further information

This project commenced with a presentation in the school hall with all junior cycle students and their teachers present. The purpose of this presentation was to give examples of the types of photos that were possible using smart phones. All present were reminded of the beauty and uniqueness of the Connemara region.

A dedicated photo competition email address was set up and students were encouraged to upload as many photographs as they wished. They were also asked to give a description of what aspect of nature each photograph represented to them. The competition was run from December to early February. In all there were 44 photographs received. This number was reduced to ten by our judging panel. The ten selected photographs were then displayed in the site canteen and all site personnel (over 200) were asked to vote on their favourite picture. Once a winner was selected, a prize giving ceremony was arranged for the school hall.

A presentation was made by the Roadbride environmental manager to the school principle of a Go-Pro camera and a booklet containing all photographs received for the photo competition. The winner was then announced who was presented with an enlarged professionally framed print of her original photograph and a high spec digital camera.

We feel that the photography competition was a good method of encouraging teenage students to notice and appreciate the diversity and beauty of the natural environment. Using their smart phone, they were able to capture the beauty of nature first hand.



*Prize Winner (Grace Hooper, aged 13 years) and her classmates*

## What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

I was motivated to run the photography competition as I thought it would be a good way to engage the interest of teenage children in nature. As most teenagers have smart phones, I felt it would be easy for them to capture photos of wildlife and the surrounding landscape while they are out and about.