

4TH ANNUAL SAND DUNE GATHERING 2026: HOSTED IN MAHAREES, CO. KERRY

The Beaches and Dunes Forum, alongside University of Galway, and the Maharees Conservation Association, are pleased to report on a successful, enlightening, and engaging Gathering. Attendees spent valuable time discussing new ideas, relaying scientific data, and sharing first-hand information and experiences about the current and future state of Ireland's sand dunes.



Afternoon field trip session on Beál Geal (Blue Flag) Beach.
Photo credit: Cathal Noonan



Professor Mary Bourke speaking on climate challenges and community organising.
Photo credit: Cathal Noonan

Professor Mary Bourke of Trinity College Dublin gave a passionate and invigorating talk on the need for communities to organise now in order to face climate challenges to come. She discussed data on extreme climate events and coastal hazards in Ireland, and what has been done thus far to combat these problems. She shared different approaches to adaptation and highlighted the need for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) as well as community action and governance initiatives.



Panelists Bláthnaid O’Loughlin, Johnny Sheehan, Martha Farrell, and Brenda O’Riordan speaking on funding opportunities.

Photo credit: Cathal Noonan

There were excellent presentations and conversations with representatives from Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Maharees Conservation Association, The Wheel, and Bord Iascaigh Mhara – Ireland’s Seafood Development Agency – discussing funding opportunities and the requirements needed for each source, as well as how to establish an organisation to be best suited to access those funding streams.



Field trip group pausing at an ephemeral pond to learn about the lifecycle of the Natterjack Toad.

Photo credit: Cathal Noonan

The day was rounded out with a beautiful sunny afternoon spent on Beál Geal (Blue Flag) Beach with a walk-and-talk supported by subject matter experts. The group learned about coastal erosion and Nature-based Solutions, Natterjack Toads, local ornithology, the ‘Goldilocks’ method of livestock grazing on sand dunes, the dangers and impacts of wild camping on fragile dune ecosystems, and the use of chestnut sand fencing to rebuild trampled dunes.

A huge thank you to all the speakers, participants, community members, photographer Cathal Noonan, and Spillane’s Bar and Restaurant in Fahamore for making the day a resounding success.

Attendees traveled from all over Ireland – as far North as Counties Donegal and Down, and as far South as Wexford and Waterford – and engaged with a variety of stakeholders including coastal geomorphologists from University of Galway, Trinity College Dublin, and University College Cork, academics from Munster Technological University and University of Limerick, government officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Office of Public Works (OPW), the Biodiversity and Climate teams on Kerry County Council, and the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO) Atlantic Seaboard North and CARO Atlantic Seaboard South. Numerous community groups were in attendance

including Leave No Trace Ireland, Maharees Conservation Association, Tramore Eco Group, Betrtra Connected, Friends of Rossnowlagh, Save Rossbeigh Beach, and CARE Ireland.

If there are any coastal conservation oriented groups who are interested in joining the Beaches and Dunes Forum, please check out the website at dunes.ie and reach out to info@leavenotraceireland.org.