

Meath farmer fined for illegal destruction of hedgerows

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A cattle farmer from Co. Meath has been fined a **total of €3,500** for the destruction of hedgerows during the bird nesting season in 2015, according to the Irish Wildlife Trust.

The IWT welcomed the ruling from Judge Grainne Malone at Navan District Court in January.

Richard Douglas from Rathmoylan, Co. Meath appeared on a summons relating to the **destruction of 800m of hedgerows** during the bird nesting season.

The case was brought against Douglas by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Conservation Ranger, Kieran Buckley.

The farmer reportedly pleaded guilty to two offences and admitted that in April, 2015 he destroyed hedgerows and part of a woodland during the closed season.

When passing sentence, the judge reportedly told the defence solicitor she would be inclined to impose a criminal conviction on Douglas.

Especially in view of the **significance of the destruction** and given the evidence presented to the court by the NPWS of the impact this destruction had on nesting birds, she said.

However, based on his guilty plea, the judge ordered that the farmer pay a **total of €3,500** to two wildlife conservation charities – €2,000 to the Butterfly Conservation Ireland and €1,500 to the IWT.



The farmer admitted to destroying 800m of hedgerows in April 2015

This is believed to be the largest fine imposed for such an offence, according to the IWT Campaigns Officer, Padraic Fogarty.

## **Closed Season**

Under the current law, Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from March 1 to August 31.

Due to this legislation actions such as hedgecutting and gorse burning are **prohibited during the closed period**.

Currently, proposed changes to the Heritage Bill are making their way through the Seanad which allow for **managed hedgecutting and burning** at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two-year basis.

These proposed changes are not in force this year, so farmers must comply with the current law.

<http://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/meath-farmer-fined-for-illegal-destruction-of-hedgerows/#>