

## FIELD TO BE TRANSPLANTED – DOWN THE ROAD



*Dan Clabby, one of the volunteers leading the project, said: "This was such a wonderful site, you could not believe the amount of species growing here, you wouldn't believe it wasn't man made."*

In what is thought to be a first in Ireland, a group of conservationists are saving a field resplendent with orchids and wildflowers from being buried beneath a new motorway.

The field near Ardrahan which boasts 300 individual wild orchids of five different species and a host of other plants synonymous with a limestone environment, is being moved sod by sod to a new picturesque site overlooking Rinville Bay outside Oranmore, ten miles away.

Dubbed Operation Orchid, the project is the brainchild of the Galway Conservation Volunteers after they decided to investigate the area being swallowed up by the Gort-to-Tuam motorway.

It was Peter Butler who came upon the field early in the Spring festooned with the Early Purple orchids. No sooner had these flowers died, another species of orchid, the Common Spotted, emerged to replace them.

Over the summer other species such as O'Kelly's Orchid, the Fragrant Orchid and the Twayblade Orchid have been growing. Other plants noted at the site include Blue Gentians, Catspaw and Scabious.

"It really does show what can happen when nature is left to its own devices. This is all 100% natural, it was all undisturbed, only for the grazing of a few goats, horses and cattle, which is actually good for the species as it removes the rough grass."

Stephen Lally in the parks department of Galway County Council offered them a site in Rinville Park which proved to be an ideal match for the Ardrahan landscape. It is in a gravelly patch beside the carpark adjacent to the sea but protected by a low stone wall to ensure it will not be accidentally mowed down.

"We are looking for as many volunteers as possible to help with Operation Orchid. We haven't transported stuff from A to B before. I doubt it's ever been done here. When word got out about the project we got all sorts of emails from around the country but our focus has been on getting a location to save this habitat," explained Dan.

Volunteers should phone 087 668 1327 for details

**DENISE MCNAMARA  
GALWAY CITY TRIBUNE**

