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**FULL COVERAGE OF  
GALWAY RING ROAD  
ORAL HEARING** → 24



**ODE TO A PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE: NEW  
BOOK ON CONNEMARA'S HIDDEN LAKES  
CELEBRATES LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP**



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# CONNACHT TRIBUNE

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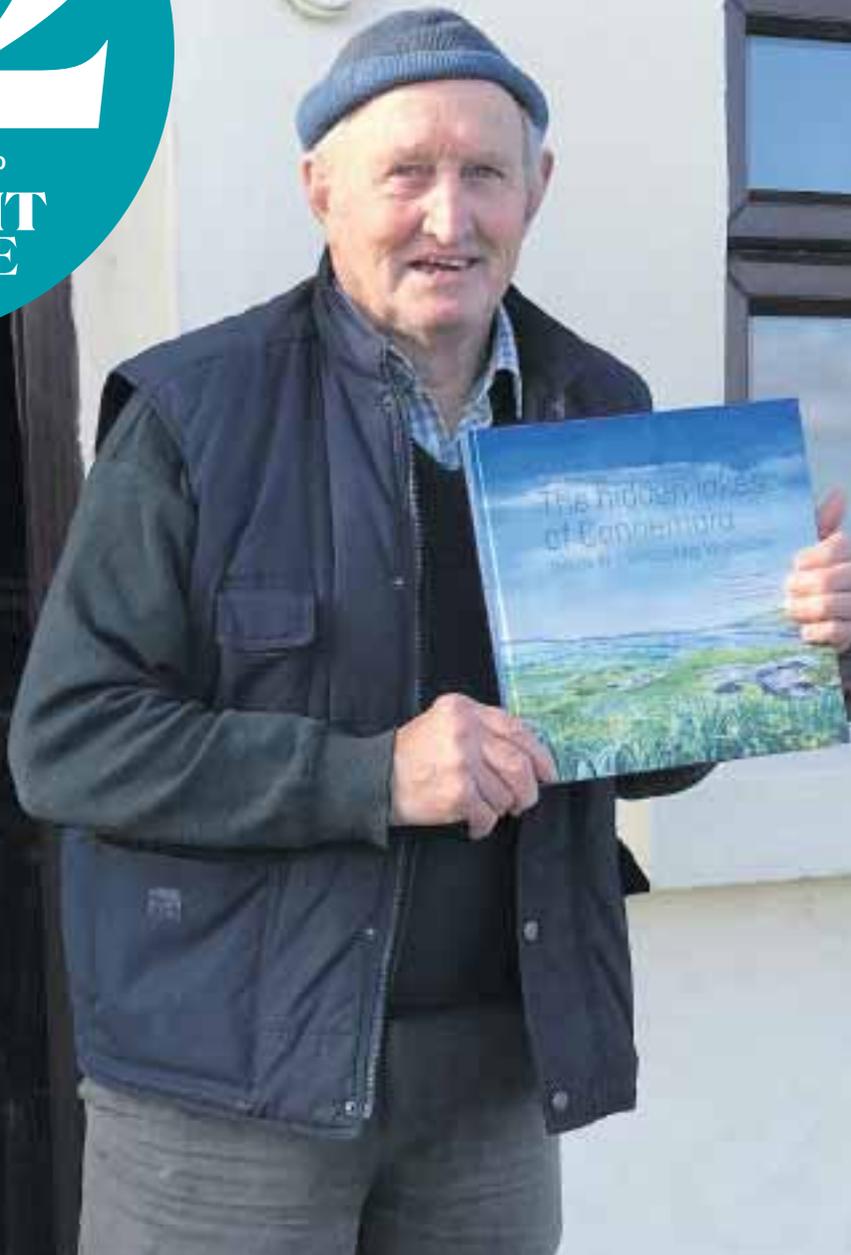
**WHO'S AT  
THE TOP OF  
GALWAY'S  
CASH  
PILE?**



→ 12



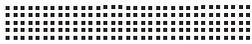
John Conneely of Lehid, Ballyconneely, with his copy of The Hidden Lakes of Connemara. It was a gift from the authors, four Dutch scientists, who first met John and his late brother Paddy, in 1975. They went on to become firm friends.



# ODE TO A PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE

■ New book on Connemara's hidden lakes celebrates lifelong friendship

**A survey of 18 Connemara lakes spanning 35 years, offers a unique insight into changes in the landscape during that time. The four Dutch botanists responsible for the project fell in love with Ireland in the 1970s and have captured their passion in a beautiful new book containing photos, paintings and poetry as well as scientific detail, as Ton Roozen and Marijke van Mansfeld tell JUDY MURPHY.**



WHEN a group of botany students from the Netherlands visited North-West Connemara in 1975 to carry out fieldwork for their university degrees, it marked the beginning of a love affair with Ireland that has lasted 45 years. And it's still going strong.

In fact, says one of those students, Ton Roozen, the students' 'grá' for Ireland had begun the previous year when on the advice of their professor, Victor Westhoff, who had a house in Roundstone, they came on holidays here. On that occasion, they hired bikes and toured the West coast.

But it was in 1975, when they took up a six-month residence in a rented cottage on Bunowen Bay for their research, that the relationship proper began. In that cottage, which had no electricity or running water, which was lit by gas and heated by a gas stove and an open fire, they began collecting their samples and assessing them in a mini-lab they set up on-site, using distilled water, carried from UCD in large containers.

Over the years, Ton and his three long-time collaborators returned to Ireland and Connemara during holidays, embarking on a longitudinal study of 18 local lakes and their hinterlands in an area south-west of Clifden and north of Roundstone. They carried out further research in 1985, 1988, 2002 and 2010, capturing the botanical and chemical changes that occurred locally during those 35 years.

Their findings are included in a new book written by Ton and his partners in science, Marijke van Mansfeld, Madeleine van Mansfeld and Jan van Groenendaal.

Ton stresses that *The Hidden Lakes of Connemara: Tribute to a Fascinating Landscape* is not a dry, scientific tome - and he's right. Visually, it's a delight, with stunning photos and watercolour paintings of the area and botanical treasures.

There are also short essays and poems as well as tributes to local people who made these visitors so welcome since their first trip all those years ago.

Marijke and Ton describe the book as a "love letter" to the area and hope it will give locals and visitors a new perspective on the multi-layered beauty of this place.

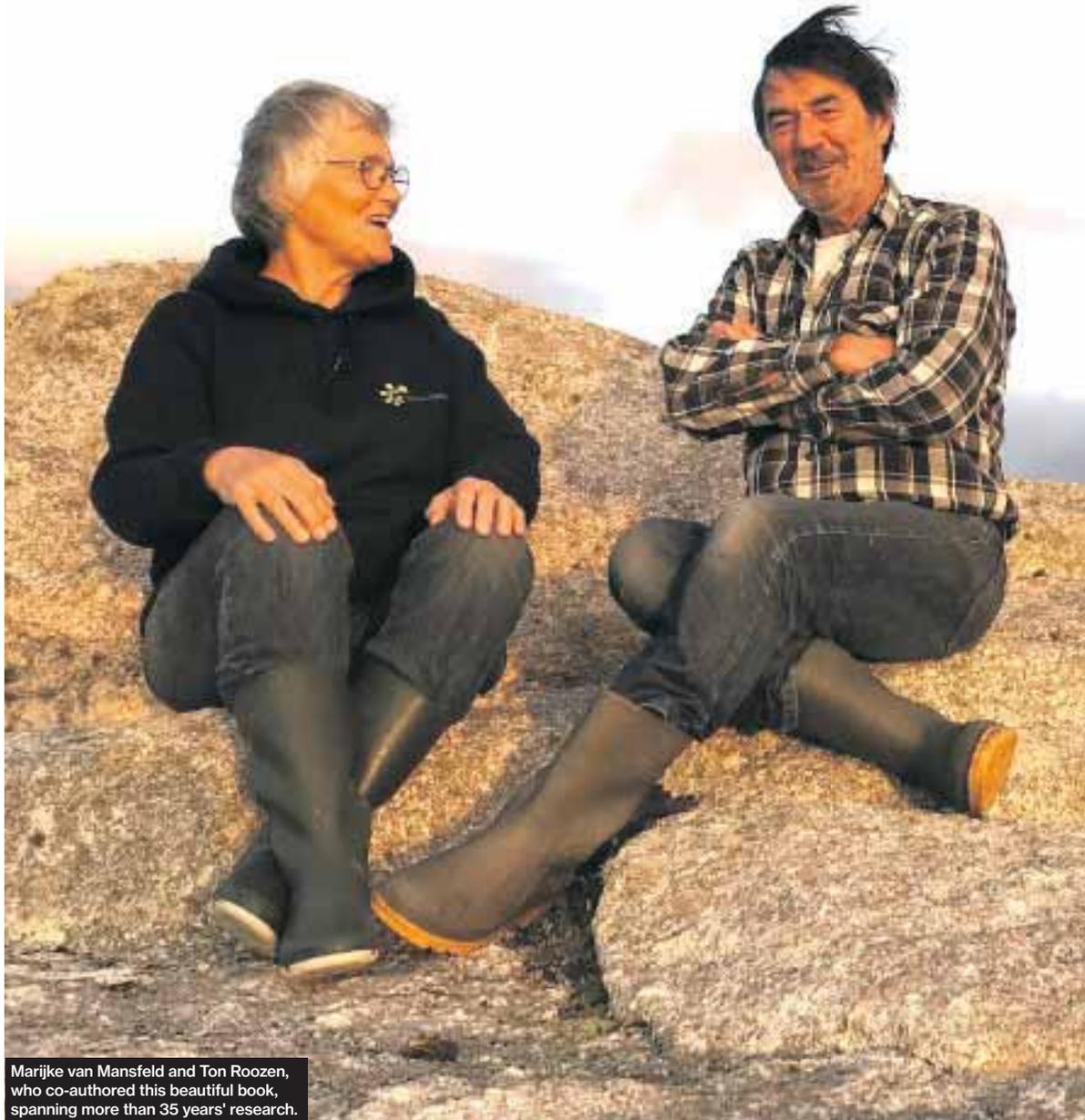
It's a very obvious labour of love that required massive time and collaboration - something that was made easier because they four are personally as well as professionally linked.

Ton and Marijke are married to each other, while Madeline is Marijke's younger sister who is married to Jan.

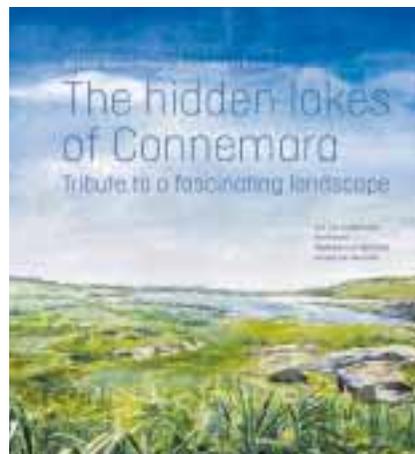
This month, before lockdown was reimposed, Ton and Marijke travelled to Galway to distribute copies of the book to local shops. They quarantined in their house on Inishturk South, off the Clifden coast, for two weeks and were in seventh heaven at having managed to get to Ireland at all - normally they visit a few times a year. They're now back home in the Netherlands, where they live in a rural area, so quarantining isn't an issue there either, they explain.

Despite their youthful appearance and energy, they are both retired.

Marijke taught biology and science at second level while Ton worked for more than 35 years as a deputy director of a heritage centre in Gelderland



Marijke van Mansfeld and Ton Roozen, who co-authored this beautiful book, spanning more than 35 years' research.



“IRELAND IS STILL SO BEAUTIFUL AND UNTOUCHED, WE WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW HOW SPECIAL IT IS”

province. Marijke is also a gifted painter as is evident from the watercolours and botanical sketches in the book.

One of the first people they visited after finishing

their quarantine on Inishturk South was local farmer and fisherman John Conneely who lives in Ballyconneely. The cottage where they first stayed in 1975 had been rented to them by John and his late brother, Paddy, and for Marijke and Ton, the two men are inextricably linked with the landscape.

In the book's acknowledgements' page, the authors thanked the many scientists and experts locally who helped them over the years, but they dedicated the publication to John and Paddy, 'the fishermen who became our friends'. The brothers' hospitality, their stories and way of life 'were a rich source of inspiration' for people who came from a vastly different world but recognised the worth of Irish traditions and hospitality.

Marijke speaks fondly of these "good men; lobster fishermen who didn't know how to swim and who took Ton out and showed him such beautiful places. And they took such care of each other".

John is still farming, they explain, keeping Connemara ponies and a few cattle.

These days, Ton and Marijke's accommodation is on Inishturk South, in a house co-owned with Ton's brother. They bought it some years ago after numerous family holidays locally, some with their four children and Jan and Madeleine, who also have four children, and others with Ton's brother and his family.

# SCIENTISTS' LABOUR OF LOVE IS GIFT TO GALWAY



Bogbean and heather are among the plants they studied.



Lough Emlaghara, as captured by Marijke.

On this visit, they've been swimming in the sea as usual although it's mid-October. And while there weren't any dolphins this time, it was beautiful, says Marijke.

Less beautiful is the amount of plastic waste that's washed up regularly on the island shoreline. Every trip they make, Ton and Marijke gather rubbish from the sea and bring it to the mainland, mostly plastic bottles, they say. Such is their love for the place that they can't not do it.

And their love for the landscape and its lakes is the reason for this book.

"Ireland is still so beautiful and untouched, we want people to know how special it is," says Marijke. Ton agrees and feels there's room for optimism, despite changes to the lakes over the years.

"There is a good awareness now of the landscape and culture."

The scientific and environmental community in the Netherlands have long been involved in supporting Ireland's ecology, in fact the young students' 1975 trip to Ireland was sponsored by a Dutch foundation.

Ton, Marijke and their co-authors of this book have played their part in that mission - in a way that appreciates the community living in the landscape.

They want a landscape "that can be kept safe for



Ton Roozen, co-author of *The Hidden Lakes of Connemara*, presenting a copy to John Conneely of Lehid, Ballyconneely. The book is dedicated to John and his late brother Paddy.

the future, to be enjoyed by its inhabitants and many visitors and admirers from elsewhere, as well as for the benefits of its natural flora and fauna".

They provide details of each lake and where these are located, but caution people that some are on private land and that permission should be gained before visiting.

Almost all the lakes surveyed are in special areas

of conservation, underpinning their importance as natural treasures. Their vegetation differs, depending on whether they are coastal or inland, and the book offers fascinating insight into this.

This work continues the tradition started in the 1930s by botanist Robert Lloyd Praeger, whose mother was Irish and father was Dutch, and that's something that gives them great satisfaction - their late mentor, Professor Westhoff, first introduced them to the renowned botanist's work. The Professor and his valuable contribution to the research and conservation of Ireland's wetlands is referenced in the foreword to this book, written by Jim Ryan, Wetland Ecologist with the National Parks and Wildlife Services.

These four former students are another link in that chain as they describe each of the 18 lakes, their hinterlands and how they've changed.

"The changes generally have been small and slow and there is still a relatively high natural diversity and ecological quality to be found in West Connemara but the tell-tale signs of a future problem are there, and so measures taken now might forestall the need for much more aggressive remedial measures later," they explain in utterly accessible language. Even more accessible are the short essays, written by Ton, Madeleine and Jan on a range of subjects, from dry-stone walling to carbon balance in Roundstone Bog. Their aim is to inform people about why changes are happening and how this sensitive area can be best cared for.

And then there are the photos and drawings - which will delight people whatever their interest in science. Another lovely gesture by these diligent scientists is that all the plants are given their Irish names alongside their scientific titles and English names.

*The Hidden Lakes of Connemara* is a truly beautiful production for which they had to enlist the help of specialist designer, Cecile Van Wezel, and they stress that they will make no profit from it. Any money that's left over after publishing costs are met will be given to a local conservation charity - but that's only if they sell enough books.

*The Hidden Lakes of Connemara* is available in Charlie Byrne's Bookshop in Galway City and in Clifden Bookshop. It can be ordered online from Byrne's and by email from Clifden Bookshop.

■ More information at [www.connemara-lakes.com](http://www.connemara-lakes.com)