SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BELCLARE TURLOUGH

SITE CODE: 000234

This triangular turlough lies below the hill of Knockacarrigeen in Co. Galway on which Belclare village is situated. On the other sides of the turlough there are large flat, drift-covered fields, with an area of bog to the north-east. The basin floor is also flat but at two different levels; a lower central area and a flat upper-terrace 30-50cm above. The turlough is completely dry during summer months except for a stream which enters from the north-east and runs to a swallow hole on the eastern side.

Since this turlough is a dry one without any standing water in the summer, there is very little vegetation diversity. The main area of the turlough is grassland with Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*). However the influence of peat in the north-eastern corner, adjacent to exposed limestone rock, and the presence of scrub on the western side, adds to the habitat interest.

The peat area is cutaway and now covered with such species as Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), horsetail (*Equisteum* spp.) and bedstraw (*Galium* spp.). This vegetation grades into Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). There are also some sedges (*Carex* spp.) and even Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*).

On the western edges, grassy areas are colonised by Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), which grow out from a taller woodland of Hawthorn, Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). Apple (*Malus domestica*) has invaded this area.

The drainage ditch has introduced an aquatic community containing Whorled Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum verticillatum*) amongst others.

Belclare Turlough is a noted bird site attracting wintering wildfowl and waders as well as birds on migration through Connaught. Based on 3 counts over the 1984/85 - 1986/87 seasons the following were recorded: Wigeon 475, Teal 165, Mallard 52, Lapwing 250, Golden Plover 58, Lapwing 250, Dunlin 20 and Curlew 208.

The site is visited by the Galway lowland population of Greenland White-fronted Geese (100-150).

The main central area is still commonage but the margins have been enclosed by walls. There are cattle and sheep on the common land but mainly cattle elsewhere. Some tillage farming has also occurred along with silage cutting. There are also abandoned peat-cuttings visible.

Belclare Turlough shows considerable diversity, with a range of plant communities from the oligotrophic north-eastern corner to the eutrophic south-east. Further habitat diversity is introduced with the presence of scrub. The birdlife, including Greenland White-fronted Geese, adds to the scientific and conservation value of the site.

5.11.2009