SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH GUR

SITE CODE: 000437

Lough Gur, some 12km west of Croom in Co. Limerick, is divided into several basins by steep hills of grey reef limestone. Two large wetlands are associated with the site: Lake Bog lies to the east, between Loughgur cross and Knockadoon Hill, and Red Bog occupies an area to the south. Currently the lake, both wetlands and Knockadoon Hill together form a proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA).

The water quality of the lake is notoriously poor – high levels of nutrients promote regular blooms of algae, which lead to oxygen debt and its associated problems, including offensive smells. In 1984 the water was reported to support an abundant growth of Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), with some stonewort algae (*Chara* spp.) in shallower water. Surrounding swamps are dominated by Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). Behind this are reed-beds with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and scattered Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*).

There are also areas of wet grassland and marshland, mainly dominated by Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) with Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and a wide range of other wetland species. Golden Dock (*Rumex maritimus*) is a wetland species of restricted occurrence in Ireland which has shown a recent decline, now Lough Gur hosts one of its four known extant populations.

Red Bog is a calcareous fen with some open pools, the fen area containing Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*), Lesser Tussock-sedge (*Carex diandra*) and Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*) amongst other fen species, such as Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*). Lake Bog is similar with a rich flora variously dominated by Common Reed, and Creeping Bent, and in places with swarms of Greater Tussock-sedge. Willows (*Salix* spp.) are widespread across this wetland.

Knockadoon Hill is a limestone hill whose surface runoff drains into the wetlands of the site. In places the soil is shallow with outcropping limestone. Its grassland and scrub communities add great diversity to the NHA.

The open water and wetlands support a great variety, and important numbers of waterbirds. In a recent publication the site is described as 'excellent' with a 'remarkable density and diversity of (wetland) birds'. Notably there are Nationally important numbers of Shoveler (av. max. 140), Tufted Duck (av. max. 328) and Coot (av. max. 776). Other species present in important numbers include Cormorant, Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall, Mallard, Pochard, Lapwing and Curlew.

Botanically the swamp, marshland and wet grassland is the most important aspect of the site, not only is this where the Golden Dock is found, but in itself is a rare complex of semi-natural habitats. The grassland, scrub and open water areas, being important supplementary habitats, add variety to the site.

The open water however shows obvious signs of nutrient enrichment and must now be regarded as vulnerable to a collapse in the current ecological function, to be replaced by a system unfavourable for higher aquatic plant growth. This process of enrichment could also effect the more terrestrial areas, replacing the current vegetation with one far more demanding of nutrients, and characterised by species such as Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and willowherbs (*Epilobium* spp.). This is clearly a matter of concern. Slowing the process of enrichment is achievable and desirable. The important wetland areas remaining may also be targeted for drainage operations. This would also be regarded as wholly unacceptable.

Apart from being of great scientific interest, the area is important archaeologically, and is remarkably scenic. The amenity value of the site has been recognised and exploited. The natural history interest of the area should also be recognised, valued, promoted and maintained.

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