SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ROSROE LOUGH

SITE CODE: 002054

Rosroe Lough is a small lake (a little over 3km long) in Co. Clare, in a shallow basin bounded by Finn Lough to the west and a complex of limestone outcrops, scrub and cultivated fields to the east. Several small lakes are associated with Rosroe.

The soil adjacent to the lake is peaty and lies on limestone. Outcrops occur frequently. A small number of limestone cliffs occur, notably north of Rosroe Castle on the east side.

Within the lake the dominant plant is Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) although it has not invaded the lake margins extensively. Dominant species on the water's edge include Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), while Downy Birch (*Betula pubsecens*) occurs a little further inland. In a number of locations Downy Birch is found with Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) as an understorey layer to Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). This association occurs at Rathlaheen North at the southern end of the lake. Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) also occurs here in great abundance where it produces self-sustaining stands of native Holly. Plants range in age here from tiny seedlings to old trees. This area of Pedunculate Oak, Downy Birch and especially Hazel supports at least one hare.

A small portion of the site is occupied by raised bog. Some of the plants here include Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*).

Much of the remainder of the site is made up of grassland. This varies from wet, rushy fields to dry scrubby grassland. In both cases the soil is peaty and lies on top of limestone. Where the land is a little higher than that at the lake's edge, the peaty soil is dry and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is common. Here and there Bog-myrtle is also common. With increasing dryness there is a transition to heath-like vegetation where Bog-myrtle is dominant.

Commercial forestry is not especially important here. The most notable area is on the west side but this is not a threat to the lake water. It does however add to the refuges available locally for birds. There is a healthy bird presence in Knocknalappa Lough including Coot, Dabchicks and a pair of Great Crested Grebe.

While Rosroe Lough is a refuge in an area of relatively high agricultural inputs, its outstanding value as an NHA refers to the south-east corner from Knocknalappa Lough to Rathlaheen North. The most valuable area is the Holly-dominated scrub and associated grassland. Here there is a finely struck balance between the requirements of moisture and acid-loving species and those requiring a more demanding dry, alkaline regime. This theme is echoed throughout the site but nowhere is such a fragile balance struck than at this location. As this area is both undulating and

contains many rock outcrops it has remained undisturbed. However, any interference here is likely to have serious negative consequences for this balance.

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