SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MEHARTH LOUGH

SITE CODE: 001900

Lough Meharth is situated adjacent to Riverstown in Co. Sligo. It is a long narrow lake set in low hills that run parellel to the Unshin River (which is also a Natural Heritage Area). The underlying geology of this area is Limestone.

The lough is quite shallow and sheltered. Towards the south-east end Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), Fine-leaved Water-dropwort (*O. aquatica*) and Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) occur in the open water. The lake edge is fairly uniform with a band of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*) backed by a scraw of Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*). Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) are present around most of the lough shore growing amongst a range of willow bushes (*Salix aurita*, *S. alba* and *S. cinerea*).

A more extensive area of wet grassland occurs in a tributary valley at the south end of the site. This area is dominated by Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and a number of other marsh herbs including Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*).

Fen areas occur at the base of slopes where calcium-rich water is emerging. These areas are rich in sedge species such as Bladder Sedge (*Carex vesicaria*), Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*) and Slender Tufted-sedge (*C. acuta*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) and Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*). A dense understorey of bryophytes occurs here including *Calliergonella cuspidata*, *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, *Plagiomnium affine* and *Cratoneuron filicinum*.

Within the site Swamp Meadow-grass (*Poa palustris*), a species listed in the Irish Red Data Book, is frequent along the lake edges and near the outflow.

Bird species recorded on the lake include Wigeon, Teal, Mallard and Coot.

Some of the wet fields surrounding the lough are grazed by sheep and cattle. Small areas are also cut for hay.

This site is listed as an area of interest largely because of the presence of Swamp Meadow-grass, a rare grass. The fen at the head of the lough is well developed and being totally ungrazed is a good example of its kind.

27.11.2009