SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH COURA

SITE CODE: 000909

Lough Coura is a small in-filled lake situated about 10km west of Kilcormac and 10km east of Banagher, Co. Offaly. The site has a long history of botanical recording and its character has been described as progressing from "an extensive swamp" in 1899, "an extensive limy marsh" in 1934, "a dry fen" in 1969 to "very few damp areas were found" in 1972.

The present condition is much the same as described in 1972. Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) predominates as deep tufts and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is sparse throughout. Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) becomes more common towards the centre and dry areas of Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) are present. Two converging drains occur on the site and Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*) and Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*) are common in their deep water. Scarce plants which were reported in 1972 include Lesser Tussock-sedge (*Carex diandra*), Bog-sedge (*Carex limosa*), Dioecious Sedge (*Carex dioica*), Broad-leaved Cottongrass (*Eriophorum latifolium*), Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*), and Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza traunsteineri*).

The Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid is a Red Data Book species.

There is a small wood consisting of Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and common mature Rowan trees (*Sorbus aucuparia*).

About 30% of the original lake area has been planted by Coillte with conifers which are quite mature at present. The largest area has been excluded from the NHA but several smaller peripheral areas have been included and post-felling management should take account of the ecology of the whole site.

The evolution from lake to dry fen at this site is unusually well-documented and it is important that no further damage occurs to the site so that the succession can be further studied.

13.11.2009