SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CLOONAGH LOUGH (MAYO)

SITE CODE: 001485

Cloonagh Lough is located in a picturesque setting 4km north-west of Ballina. Although close to Lough Conn and the other larger lakes to the south, it is quite different in character as it is underlain by glacial drift rather than the more usual acidic substrate. It is a small lake and has an interesting ecology because of its mixture of acidic and neutral or base areas and forms an interesting contrast to Lough Conn.

The lake lies in a basin surrounded by rich farmland. Cutover bogland occurs on the western side of the lake while the southern shore is bounded by drift covered hills. Extensive reed-beds occur in the lake reducing the area of open water but creating cover for waterfowl. There is also a fringe of mixed deciduous woodland on part of the shore, and there is a large wooded island, possibly an ancient crannóg, in the centre of the lake.

The vegetation found on the lakeshore margins includes a good diversity of wetland plants such as Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Square-stalked St. John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*), Marsh Arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Lesser Tussock-sedge (*Carex diandra*) are also present but less frequent species in the marshy areas around the lake.

Birdlife include Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers in summer, while Mallard, Teal and Wigeon are frequent visitors to the lake in winter - the site may be used as an overwintering site for waterfowl within the Killala Bay area. In addition, there is a heronry on the island.

There appears to be a resident population of Otters around the lake.

Cloonagh Lough is naturally eutrophic and attractive to insect species and other invertebrate life. The sun-fly (*Heliophyllum* spp.) is especially abundant.

In addition to its geological and botanical interest, this site is of local importance to wildlife in the region.

20.11.2009