SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH BANE

SITE CODE: 001721

Lough Bane lies about 3km to the south-east of Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough. For the most part it is surrounded by bogland, which to the west stretches to the River Inny and is otherwise mainly surrounded by Coillte plantation. The lake and surrounding bogs has been proposed as a Natural Heritage Area (NHA).

The bogs encircle the lough to the north, west and south. Between Lough Bane and the small lough to the east there is some attempt at drainage, but most of the bog is intact and in places shows good pool development.

The lough itself is now less extensive than it was in 1908 when it was mapped by the Ordnance Survey, possibly as a result of natural accretion, or possibly the water level was lowered as a result of drainage. Now, in places the level area fringing the lake which was formerly open water, has been colonised by bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), and a large island has appeared in the south of the lough. The contemporary edge of the open water is marked by swamps of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), and behind this there are areas of freshwater marshes with species such as Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Marsh Arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*) which grades into grassland dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), in which there is now considerable establishment of Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). At the edge of the NHA area to the west, Purple Moor-grass grassland grades into bog heath vegetation dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*).

There is little information on the use of the lake by water birds, but in 1971 a count included 53 Whooper Swan, 16 Teal, 7 Widgeon and 14 Curlew, suggesting that is of some local importance for these species, and that it may act as a refuge for swans disturbed from some of the larger Westmeath lakes.

Although the bogland in which Lough Bane is situated, has been damaged, the lough itself appears less disturbed and has retained its interest as one of the only lakes in the area with a low calcium nutrient regime. The surrounding vegetation is a well developed ecological gradient from developing birch carr through to the open water.

There is already a conifer plantation to the south-west, now some 25 years old. Further plantation within the NHA area would be very deleterious, not only to the area in which the plantation was established, but over the whole site.

The bogs were overlooked when lowland raised bogs were surveyed in the 1980s and consequently their value was not realised until recently. Here their ecological position in relation to Lough Bane adds to their interest. Active raised bogs, once characteristic of central Ireland, are now rare and vulnerable, and have been

recognised by the European Union as a habitat of international importance. Ireland has a special responsibility to conserve the best of its remaining bogs. Afforestation or further drainage work within this NHA is not consistent with this responsibility.

25.11.2009