SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CLONTY LOUGH

SITE CODE: 000977

Clonty Lough Natural Heritage Area lies about 5km north-west of Killeshandra, west of the Lough Oughter complex of small lakes. It is set in an agricultural landscape of low drumlins in Co. Cavan.

This lake is calcareous and is surrounded in places by a dense reed swamp of Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) and Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*). Elsewhere Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) extends out into the water. The lake basin is flat so that plant growth is rapid and has extended the margins over former areas of water. The main marsh is therefore a floating mat of vegetation, based on Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). In this, many other species have become established including the sedges *Carex lepidocarpa* and *C. panicea*, Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) and forget-me-nots (*Myosotis* spp.).

Behind this zone a more mineral marsh occurs which dries out significantly in summer and is flooded in winter. Rushes are frequent here especially Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) and Jointed Rush (*J. articulatus*) and they grow in company with Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*) and patches of Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*). The more interesting plant species that occur include Elongated Sedge (*Carex elongata*), Cowbane (*Cicuta virosa*), Tall Fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*), Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) and Knotted Pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*).

Colonisation of these communities by trees is conspicuous though a high grazing pressure keeps most of them small. Many willows (*Salix cinerea* and *S. aurita*), birches (*Betula* spp.) and alders (*Alnus* spp.) occur, spreading from groups of more mature trees that in places reach the lakeshore. The two latter species provide feeding for insectivorous birds during the summer months and also attract flocks of finches (especially Redpolls) in autumn. These seeds are eaten too by dabbling duck and small numbers of Mallard and Teal are present in winter. Snipe are noticeably common. Due to the large amount of low lying land, aquatic invertebrates are well represented.

This site houses one of the largest concentrations of Elongated Sedge, which in the Republic is restricted to a very few sites in Cavan and Leitrim. It also occurs lower down the Erne valley and at Lough Neagh but at a lower density. Clonty Lough has considerable ecological value for this reason.

16.11.2009