SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CASTLE LAKE

SITE CODE: 000239

Castle Lake is situated approximately, 3km north of Sixmilebridge in Co. Clare. It lies in a shallow basin bounded by low glacial hills. The soil is a boulder clay with occasional gravel layers. The site extends from Pollagh Bridge in the north-east to Ballymulcashel Bridge in the south-west and includes Castle Lake, Ballymucashel Lake, stretches of the Owenogarney River and associated wetlands.

The main habitat present within this site is open water including Castle Lake and Ballymulcashel Lough. Large reed-beds dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) are present around the margins of Ballymulcahsel Lough with smaller beds also occurring around parts of Castle Lake. Inshore of the reed-beds are long stretches of discontinuous Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*). MacCarthy's Island, in the middle of Castle Lake, is dominated by old willow trees (*Salix* spp.) and a large Cormorant colony breeds here. Although not a large river the Owenogarney River is an essential feature of the site, flowing from the north-east.

Two secondary habitats present within the site include Hazel scrub and ash/oak woodland. The best examples occur close to the north-west shore of Castle Lake where Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) grade into a Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) scrub which in turn grades into an Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) woodland with some oak (*Quercus* spp.) and abundant Hazel.

A number of wet fields on the south-east side of the site are included. These are species-rich and dependant on a continued regime of limited drainage and minimal fertilisation. Although no rare plants were noted this wet grassland does add diversity to the site. A marsh with a rich bryophyte flora and many sedges (*Carex* spp.) occurs at the north end of the site.

Other habitats present include mixed woodland at the south-east and south-west corners of the site. The former is now self-sustaining, having been planted in the last century. Trees include Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Ash and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). It is an open woodland with a diverse ground flora. Many Ash and Beech seedlings are also present.

On the west side of the site land-use consists of cattle grazing and silage. Considerable scrub clearance has taken place reducing the extent of this semi-natural habitat. The planted mixed woodland in the south-east corner has long remained intact and does not appear under threat.

Threats and damage to the open water habitats may come from drainage and afforestation. To date these impacts are minimal. The species-rich wet grassland will be seriously threatened if drainage or fertilisation becomes a regular occurrence here.

The site contains a diversity of wetland and woodland habitats ranging from open water and reed-beds to lakeside wet deciduous woodland to ash/oak woodland and scrub to species-rich wet fields and marsh. This is a relatively small site but still retains substantial habitat diversity in the face of considerable reclamation work in the area over the years.

5.11.2009