SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: RATHBAUN TURLOUGH

SITE CODE: 000215

Rathbaun Turlough occupies a well defined, rectangularly-shaped basin in low-lying countryside halfway between Tuam, Co. Galway and Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo. A river flows into the turlough from the north and the turlough is drained by a swallow hole to the west, near a temporary lake. The drainage into the bedrock has been altered by human interference, which has resulted in abandoned channels and piles of debris. The turlough seems drier than it would naturally be, and as a result there is little likelihood of peat formation at the present time.

Rathbaun Turlough has a simple topography and the associated vegetation follows its contours in a fairly regular way. The uppermost zone is predominantly sedge/heath grassland with dry grassland associated with the limestone rock outcrops at the northern end. As the slope lessens, wet grassland predominates, and rushes are common in the hollows that retain dampness the longest.

Grazing and trampling by cattle and sheep is common, and leads to a breakdown of the vegetation structure. Despite this, and the fact that the hydrology of the basin has been altered from its natural state, the size and character of the turlough is noteworthy.

At present, the turlough is too dry and heavily grazed for a full development of its potential vegetation, or for the breeding of birds. But the nature of its drainage would make it possible for its water levels to be managed. However, because of its physical uniformity, the site contains large areas of three plant communities: the largest stand of the dry Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) community, the third largest of species poor Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) community and a stand of wet annuals which contains both Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*) and Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*), two rare plant species.

5.11.2009