SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH ALLUA

SITE CODE: 001065

Lough Allua is an expanded section of the river Lee where it meets an obstruction of rock and glacial debris above Inchigeelagh in Co. Cork. The floor of the valley is flat-bottomed so that the lakeshore is complex with numerous bays, peninsulas and narrows. In addition, the fluctuation in water level seems unusually great so that a considerable area of surrounding land is flooded in winter.

The river runs over sandstone and blanket bog for its entire course and consequently the lake water is acidic and stained brown, though fairly rich in nutrients. The marginal flora of the open lake is sparse, including Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), but it is better developed in the shelter of the bays and ponds. Here both water-lilies (*Nymphaea alba* and *Nuphar lutea*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) occur. On the surrounding land there is a widespread community of rushes (*Juncus effusus, J. acutiflorus*) and Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*). More locally peaty ground and cutover bog occur where Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) and voilets (*Viola canina* and *V. palustris*) are characteristic.

A feature of the eastern half of the lake basin is the presence of a number of large and small rocky outcrops. Rock also outcrops within the heath communities which are characterised by heathers (*Erica cinerea, Calluna vulgaris*), English Stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*), Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) and Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*). In a few places the rare Pale Dog-violet (*Viola lactea*), which is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, grows in this community. Reclamation has occurred right up to some of the outcrops and close to the lakeshore, but there remain certain areas where unfertilised grassland persists, generally on the peninsulas.

Acid woodland has developed in places; in the south-eastern corner of the site this habitat contains oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) with Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Common Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum pratense*), St. Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*) and Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*). Elsewhere there are small willow (*Salix* spp.) woods with Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and Lady-fern (*Athyrium felix-femina*) and, locally, Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*) and Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*).

Areas of alluvial woodland occur to the east of Inchigeelagh. Small islands in the braided river channel support Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), birch (*Betula* spp.), willow, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxius excelsior*), occasional oak, Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*). A small population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels occurs in the permanent channels between these islands.

The lakeshore supports Snipe, Sedge Warbler, Lapwing and Heron, while Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Mallard and Moorhen also nest. The number of wintering waterfowl is small but up to 50 Mallard, Tufted Duck and Teal have been recorded.

The Lough Allua area has significant heritage value because of its diversity of habitats and the presence of several unusual plants, including a protected species.

17.11.2009