SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: PALLAS LOUGH

SITE CODE: 000916

Pallas Lough lies about 7km south-west of Tullamore, in limestone-rich gravel drift over Lower limestone. As a result the lake water is rich in calcium, a chief component of limestone. Marl precipitates out of the water to coat stone, and especially vegetation surfaces, thus the lake could be said to be a 'marl lake'. The eastern shore runs into peaty soils.

The aquatic component of the lake vegetation is reputed to be rich, with Charophytes (*Chara* spp. and *Nitella* spp.) and pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.).

Lowering of the water level has resulted in the exposure of sediments which have been colonised by communities of swamp, marsh and wet grassland plant associations, particularly along the southern and eastern shores. Reed swamp, mainly dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), colonising shallow water, has divided the open water surface into two. In places the reed swamp is dry enough to become colonised by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*).

The area to the north of Clonterlough Wood contains Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) a species very much indicative of wet, calcium-rich, peaty substrates. It grows with Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and peatland species such as Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*).

Marshland and wet grassland on the southern side of the lake, grazed by cattle and sheep, has large areas of Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) along with a variety of wetland herbs, and Common Reed which spreads back from the swamps. These are botanically rich areas - one small area was inhabited by 79 plant species, 12 of which were sedges (*Carex* spp.).

Within the boundary of the proposed Natural Heritage Area there are also two small wet woods dominated by Downy Birch, one of which is recovering from partial clearance about twenty years ago. There is also an area of limestone grassland which yields such species as Field Gentian (*Gentianella campestris*) and Common Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*).

Significant numbers of wildfowl and waders use the lake. The reed swamp fringes and centre provide cover and make ideal nesting areas for ducks such as Mallard, Teal and Widgeon. The peripheral wet grassland is grazed in the winter by geese. The rare Marsh Harrier has recently been seen hunting in the area.

This area is of botanical interest due to the diversity of plant habitats and the species richness of those habitats. To a large degree these features are promoted by the calcium richness of the site.

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