SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: COLGAGH LOUGH

SITE CODE: 001658

Colgagh Lough is a small lake nestled in the southern foothills of the Ben Bulben mountain range, 1km north of Lough Gill and 5km west of Sligo. This lake is underlain by limestone bedrock and is noted for its rich deposits of marl. Marl is white sediment composed of calcium carbonate which is derived from the decomposed matter of gelatinous algae and charophytes which grow in the lake. It accumulates on the bottom of the lake and on aquatic vegetation and is a fairly sterile substrate so few plants will grow on it.

However, at Colgagh Lough there are several aquatic species present including rafts of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*) with Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*), Fen Pondweed (*Potamogeton coloratus*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*).

The margin of the lake is stony and is dominated by grasses and sedges (*Carex* spp.) with herbs such as Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*) and the moss *Climacium dendroides*.

Colgagh Lough is also unusual in that it has no surface water outlet. Water has been seen to drain through a swallow hole and it has been suggested that Colgagh Lough may have an underground link to Lough Gill but this remains unproven. However, this interesting geomorphological aspect of the lake also makes it more sensitive to pollution as there is a more restricted flow of water in and out of the lake. The use of fertilisers on the pastures which slope steeply down to the lakeshore could pose a threat to its water quality.

Some adjacent fields have also been cleared of scrub woodland. This type of damage not only reduces the habitat diversity of the area and thus its attraction to wildlife is diminished, but it also can increase the amount and rate of runoff of fertilisers and other nutrients into the lake, thus further increasing the risk of water pollution. However at present there are no definite signs of any deterioration in water quality.

Colgagh Lough also supports a rich invertebrate fauna, comprised of molluscs, beetles (Coleoptera spp.), leeches and a variety of waterfowl such as Mallard, Heron, Little Grebe, Wigeon, Teal, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Mute Swans and Whooper Swans.

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