SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: VARTRY RESERVOIR

SITE CODE: 001771

The Vartry Reservoir is located to the east of Roundwood, in the upper catchment of the Vartry River. The lower reservoir was constructed in the 1860s and the upper reservoir completed in 1924. Both are owned and managed by Dublin Corporation. The annual fluctuation in water levels is in the order of 4 or 5m. Lowest levels are generally reached in September/October, and maximum levels between February and May. With the exception of Poulaphouca Reservoir, Vartry is the largest inland waterway in the south-east of Ireland.

A distinct type of vegetation, mainly of annual species, occurs on the muds and gravels within the range of fluctuating water levels. The silty floor at lower levels, especially at the northern end, supports vegetation dominated by Marsh Cudweed (*Gnaphalium uliginosum*). A species rich vegetation occurs on the gently sloping muddy shores, and to a lesser extent on the gravel shores; species include Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Water-pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper*), Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*), Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), and both Small and Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata* & *G. fluitans*). Two plant species, which are relatively rare in Ireland other than in the south-west, occur in the areas of fluctuating water levels - these are Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) and Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*).

Dwarf shrub heath and acid grassland occur together as a mosaic. In the wetter heath areas, grasses are abundant, dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with occasional Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). The areas of dry heath are dominated by Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). The vegetation of areas of acid grassland is rather variable and includes fescue species (*Festuca* spp.), Cock’s-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*).

Marshy grasslands occur most extensively at the northern end of the Upper Reservoir, where grasses, sedges and rushes occur with Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Devil's-bit Scabious and Common Valerian (*Valeriana officianalis*).

Broad-leaved woodland occurs in a strip around the perimeter of the lakes, with a block occurring between the northern end of the Lower Reservoir and the enbankment. Most of the woodland is dominated by Downy Birch, with Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and willow (*Salix* spp.). Two areas of plantation woodland are included in the site; a mature Scots Pine plantation at the

southern end of the Upper Reservoir, and a small area of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) to the east of the Lower Reservoir.

The site has considerable ornithological interest, mostly for wintering waterfowl. The Greylag Goose population is of national importance (average peak 242, winters 1985/86-88/89). In the same period the following were also recorded: Whooper Swan (average peak 35), Teal (average peak 22), Mallard (average peak 72), Pochard (average peak 10) and Tufted Duck (average peak 31). The site is used as a night roost for gulls with up to 1,800 Black-headed Gulls having been recorded.

Great Crested Grebe has bred, or attempted to breed, at the Vartry since about 1990, while Little Grebe breeds annually. Several pairs of Lapwing breed annually, and Teal probably breeds here as well.

Although Vartry Reservoir originated as an artificial lake, it has, over time, developed a diversity of habitats, from wetland vegetation to heathland and woodland. The presence of some plant species which are relatively rare in eastern Ireland adds further interest to the site. The site is of national importance for Greylag Geese, and of regional or local importance for several other waterfowl species.

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