SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: WATERSTOWN LAKE

SITE CODE: 001732

About 6km north-west of Athlone, Waterstown Lake lies between Carraun Hill to the north, and a peat bog to the south. There is active peat formation along a half or two thirds of the lake margin. This peaty shore is in sharp contrast to the calcium-rich water that enters the lake from the surrounding limestone gravel drift. The lake is in a state of flux.

There are extensive fen and species-rich reed-bed areas which now divide the open water into pools. These have an interesting species composition with the main plants being Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and a few species of true sedges including Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*). Also found is the rare Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*).

Areas of dry former lake bed to the north and north-east are now calcareous marshes with the characteristic Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*).

The woods around the lough include interesting, wet woodlands of birch (*Betula* spp.), willow (*Salix* spp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) that are extending into the marginal lake areas and established woods which are diverse, with oak (*Quercus* spp,), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*). Unfortunately the woods have become very unnatural in composition due to the introduction and spread of non-native species such as dogwood (*Cornus* spp.), Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), spruce (*Picea* spp.) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*).

As may be expected with this mixture of different habitats, birds and invertebrates are well represented on the site.

Drainage of adjacent peatlands is now directing acidic water into the lake and modifications to the lake outlet have lowered the lake water level. Nevertheless this is still a fine example of a calcium-rich fen with an interesting and rare interface between alkaline calcium-rich water and acidic peatland.

25.11.2009