SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYVERGAN MARSH

SITE CODE: 000078

Ballyvergan Marsh is located on the south coast, about 3 km south-west of Youghal town. The site extends for over 2 km along its long axis and is on average 500 m in width. The main Cork road runs to the north of the site.

The marsh comprises a large reed swamp, dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). A variety of the larger sedges also occur (*Carex riparia, C. acuta, C. pseudocyperus* and *C. acutiformis*), whilst Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*), Purple-loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) grow interspersed among the sedges. On muddier ground, which is flooded only in winter, Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) and Nodding Bur-Marigold (*Bidens cernua*) are found. There is also some scrub (*Salix* spp.) and marginal areas of fen and wet grassland. The marsh is separated from the sea by a shingle bank and sand hills. A nearby area of coastal clay/sand cliff is included in the site – the rare Red Data Book species Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) has been recorded growing here in abundance, along with such species as Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*).

The site supports an excellent diversity of bird species associated with swamp vegetation. During the 1990s, it had the largest population of Reed Warbler in Ireland, with an estimate of between 25 and 50 breeding pairs by 1995/96. Sedge Warbler also breeds throughout the site. Other breeding birds include Moorhen, Water Rail, Mallard and Reed Bunting. Ballyvergan Marsh is a notable passage migration point for a range of passerine species in late summer and autumn. Regular ringing since 1989, which has involved the banding of over 15,000 birds, has shown the site to be of major importance for migrating Swallows and Sedge Warblers. Other species which are recorded regularly include Reed Warbler, Willow Warbler, Wren and Blue Tit. The high concentration of small birds regularly attracts birds of prey. Of particular note is that the site is a winter roost for Hen Harrier, with up to 5 individuals recorded in some years.

Grazing is the main land use within the site, mainly in marginal areas. Owing to its proximity to Youghal town, the greatest threat comes from land reclamation. Large-scale reed burning had occurred in the past though has not been noted in recent years.

The site includes the largest freshwater coastal marsh in Co. Cork and supports a diversity of well-developed plant communities. It is of additional botanical importance as a site for the rare Wild Clary. Ballyvergan Marsh is also of ornithological importance, as a pre-migration stop-over point for various passerine species on their way to wintering grounds further south, and as a breeding site for Reed Warbler, still a very localised species in Ireland. The presence of Hen Harrier is of significance as this species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

1.5.2009