SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGHMORE COMMON TURLOUGH

SITE CODE: 000438

Loughmore Turlough is located about 5km south-west of Limerick City, adjacent to the main Limerick/Cork road (N20) and north of it. It lies in a shallow basin, elongated in an east-west direction, and floods shallowly (30-40cm) in winter.

A variety of plant communities occur, depending on substrate type and degree of wetness. In the western half of the site, and along the eastern shore, the substrate is peaty, and the vegetation is dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.), with Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*), Tall Fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*), Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*), Hard Rush (*Juncus inflexus*) and Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*). Some of these species are more commonly associated with marshes than with turloughs. Also unusual is the occurrence of Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*) and Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), two species which, although relatively more common here than in other regions, have not been recorded at other Irish turloughs. A calcium-rich environment is evident in places, with the occurrence of the moss species, *Campylium stellatum*, in the ground layer.

The flooding area is largely dominated by Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), with accompanying grasses and herbs such as Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), and Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*). Wetter areas within the site, e.g. hollows and ditches, support a slightly different vegetation, with Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*). The vegetation shows a maritime influence with the occurrence of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and Slender Spike-rush (*Eleocharis uniglumis*). These species are more typically found in upper saltmarsh habitats, and their presence suggests that there may be a slight salt influence in the floodwater, or may be a reflection of the site's location close to the Shannon Estuary.

Standing water on the site is colonised by Water Horsetail, Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Water-cress (*Nasturtium officinale)* and Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*). Small areas of limestone grassland and wet grassland are also present.

The rare plant species, Opposite-leaved Pondweed (*Groenlandia densa*), occurs on the site, as does Meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*). Both of these species are protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

Loughmore provides suitable winter habitat for Lapwing and Golden Plover, and Snipe breed here.

The main threats to the site are drainage, agricultural reclamation, pollution and afforestation. Loughmore is apparently drier today than it has been in the past, and it

seems that drainage of the surrounding land rather than of the site itself may be the reason. There is evidence that bird numbers at the site may have reduced as a result of the dessication.

Turloughs are a rare habitat in Europe, and in Ireland are under threat from agricultural intensification. Although affected by drainage, Loughmore is an unusual example of this habitat type. Due to the site's southerly location, its shallowness, its proximity to the sea and some calcium enrichment, the flora of Loughmore includes some unique elements, which enhance the conservation value of this turlough.

6.11.2009