SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH NANEAGH

SITE CODE: 001814

This site is located approximately 10km north-east of Castlepollard, about 2km off the road to Oldcastle. It spans the Cos Meath/Westmeath border, lying mostly in Meath. The site consists of a complex of small lakes (the largest of which is Lough Naneagh itself) and wetlands which lie in poorly-drained hollows between drumlins and moraisic hummocks. This undulating topography is a typical product of glaciation and the soil type in this site is glacial drift which is a calcium-rich, poorly-drained substrate.

The lakes in this site, are fringed by broad bands of fen vegetation particularly Lough Naneagh and Deerpark Lough. Plants which are typical of fens occur here e.g. Black-Bog-Rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Long-Stalked Yellow Sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and Great Fen-Sedge (*Cladium mariscus*). The margins of open water are typically colonised by Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). In some cases, the fens in this site are developing further to form bogs. Towards the centre, the ground is firmer and drier and bog plants are found.

Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) are abundant here, and there is a good cover of *Sphagnum* mosses (*S. capillifolium*).

On the drumlins or hummocks, the grasslands tend to be species-rich and contain a range of species typical of calcareous grasslands. These include Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*). The grasslands are variously improved for pasture, with a resulting reduction in species diversity in more heavily improved fields. The elongated hummock or esker which runs in an approximately east/west direction south of the lakes is partially covered by woodland. The woodland varies in character. Some areas are dominated by multi-stemmed Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with frequent Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), while in others, the canopy is formed by Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).

The ground flora includes an attractive variety of wildflowers including Early-Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Goldilock's Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

The main land use practice in the site is cattle-grazing. Uncontrolled cattle access to the lakeshore, fens and woodland would threaten the survival of the semi-natural vegetation. Drainage of outflowing channels and/or pollution of in-flowing channels would pose a major threat to the lakes and fens. Application of fertilisers can lead to a reduction in species diversity of calcareous grasslands on the drumlins. In the woodlands, there is much evidence of damage and disturbance related to removal of

timber. Indiscriminate clearing or removal of trees could lead to a degeneration of woodland structure and a reduction in the quality of this habitat.

In summary, this site is recommended as a NHA due to the presence of transitional fen and lake habitats. Species-rich grasslands and woodland lend habitat diversity to the site and enhance its educational potential. The site was rated as being of local importance by An Foras Forbartha in 1972.

26.11.2009