SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH DARGAN

SITE CODE: 001906

Lough Dargan is a small lake of 33.5ha, located 0.9km south of Sligo town. It is situated on the geological boundary of the Ox mountain metamorphic genesis with quartzite rocks to the west and limestone to the south and east. It is fed mainly by water from the mountains and is a source of drinking water for the local area. The Ox Mountains NHA is to the south-west of Lough Dargan and Lough Gill NHA is 4.5km to the north.

The main habitat of the site is the lake itself, its waters are clear and the lake bed is mostly strong at the edge. In the shallow waters Slender-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton filiformis*), Red Pondweed (*P. alpinis*), Delicate Stonewort (*Chara virgata*) and Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) are found. Deeper water supports the growth of White Water-lily (*Nymphaea alba*), yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*), Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*), occasional stands of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*). Further into the lake in water 1.7m deep and beyond there are recorded plants of waterweed (*Elodea* spp.) and Long-stalked Pondweed (*Potamogeton praelongus*).

Adjacent to some of the lake shore is marginal vegetation of wet grassland. At the western edge there is much dominated grassland with tussocks of Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Jointed Rush (Juncua articulatus), Sharp-flowered Rush (*J. acutiflorus*) and sedges such as Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Common Sedge (*C. nigra*), Star sedge (*C. echinata*) and Common Yellow-sedge (*C. demissa*). Scattered amongst the sward are forbs such as Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). *Calliergonella cuspidata* is also frequently found.

There is some semi-natural woodland on the eastern lake margin comprising of willow (*Salix* spp.), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). Woodland is also found around the ruins of the castle situated on the top of the limestone cliff. Some of the woodland is in the form of parkland with tall trees of elm (*Ulmus* spp.), Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hipposcastanum*) and Ash. The wired walls support the growth of many bryophytes and scrub woodland of Hawthorn and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and herbs such as Hedgerow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenacium*), Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and the fern Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*). The rather rare Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*) is also found around the old ruins.

Away from the lake margin itself much of the land surrounding the lake is agricultural grassland grazed by cattle and sheep. A possible threat to the water quality is slurry and fertiliser application to the sloping fields adjacent to the lough - an algae bloom

sometimes develops in the water, possibly as a result of this. Some of the original lake-side vegetation has been heavily grazed and trampled although, overall, the lake-side vegetation is botanically interesting and varied.

It is noted that both Mallard and Tufted Duck use the lake in winter and a pair of Mute Swans are found on the lake throughout the year. The lake and surrounding land is also used by Fox, Badger and possibly Otter.

Lough Dargan is recommended for inclusion as an NHA because of its botanical diversity with both a varied aquatic flora and interesting marginal wet grassland communities and also woodland and old wall/exposed rock habitats. This is partly due to its unusual habitat conditioning, created by the juxtaposition of the two different rock types, being intermediate between an acid lake and a lowland calcareous one.

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