

Site Name: Lough Gash Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000051

Lough Gash Turlough lies in the low landscape west of Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare. The turlough has a very flat basin and is overlooked by houses to the east and pasture to the west. The shore of the turlough rises as a stony slope on the west side, where outcropping rocks are visible. Water rises mainly from the rocks at the southern end, but there is overground flow also - one stream discharges from the town's sewage works.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[3180] Turloughs* [3270] <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidens</i> p.p. vegetation

This turlough is particularly late-draining, and as a result supports a very distinctive plant community: Rivers with muddy banks with *Chenopodium rubri* p.p. and *Bidens* p.p. vegetation. The central zone is covered by an open vegetation of Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*), Small Water-pepper (*Polygonum minus*), Trifid Bur-marigold (*Bidens tripartita*), Fine-leaved Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe aquatica*), Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius*) and the rare Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*). The rare annual moss *Ephemerum cohaerens* occurs on open mud.

On the slightly higher ground, around the centre of the turlough, Fine-leaved Water-dropwort dominates, with Great Yellow-cress (*Rorippa amphibia*), Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus trichophyllus*), Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) and some Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) also occurring.

Parts of the shore have a more grassy vegetation, comprising Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*) and the rare Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) (listed in the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999). This grades into a narrow fringe of Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*) and cinquefoil (*Potentilla* spp.) species.

The streams introduce a different flora; by the stream from the sewage works such species as Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Nodding Bur-marigold (*Bidens cernua*) are found, while at the southern end there is a marshy area with Willows (*Salix* spp.) and sedges (*Carex* spp.).

Gadwall, Pochard and Tufted Duck are regular in winter; Coot, Moorhen, Mallard, Snipe and a high number of Mute Swan (71 individuals, average peak from 3 counts, 1984/85 - 1986-87) are also found.

Lough Gash Turlough is one of the latest turloughs to dry out in any year and may fail to do so sometimes; as such it is highly rated for being at one of the extremes of turlough variation, i.e. wetness. It is also of considerable ecological interest for its eutrophic nutrient status. The annual flora found at the site is highly distinctive and well-developed: there are only fragments of such vegetation at other turloughs. The presence of an abundance of the rare Northern Yellow-cress and of the protected Orange Foxtail (in its only Clare site) is notable.