

Site Name: Sessiagh Lough SAC

Site Code: 000185

Sessiagh Lough is a small lowland oligotrophic lake, situated 0.5 km inland of Sheephaven Bay and 3 km south-east of Dunfanaghy in Co. Donegal. The lake has a stony bottom of metamorphic bedrock (Lower Dalradian) and a barren appearance, with neither marginal reedswamp vegetation nor visible benthic vegetation. Nonetheless, for an acid lake, it has an exceptionally high biomass. It is bounded on its northern edge by agricultural fields and houses, and on the south side by steep heath-covered slopes and cliffs. There is also a small rocky island within the lough.

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):

[3130] Oligotrophic to Mesotrophic Standing Waters [1833] Slender Naiad (<i>Najas flexilis</i>)
--

Sessiagh Lough is an example of an oligotrophic to mesotrophic lake, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Other habitats present within the site include blanket bog, comprising species such as Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), hummocks of bog moss species (*Sphagnum* spp.) and *Breutelia chrysocoma*; upland Bent (*Agrostis*)/Fescue (*Festuca*) grassland; heath dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*); and small patches of scrub woodland. Generally, these habitats are relatively undisturbed, the grazing by sheep and cattle not being intensive.

The lake contains both rare plants and animals. Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*), a rare and legally protected species which is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive as well as on the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015, is recorded from the site. Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), a rare freshwater fish listed in the Irish Red Data Book of threatened vertebrates, and Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*), are also known from the lake. On the small rocky island Common Terns, an Annex I species in the E.U. Birds Directive, and Black-headed Gulls have been recorded. The steep, lichen-covered cliffs to the south of the lough provide nesting sites for Peregrines, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, and also for Fulmars. To prevent their disturbance a buffer zone behind the cliffs is incorporated into the site. The vegetation of this buffer is of an acidic nature, reflecting its peaty substrate.

Pollution due to agricultural run-off and the impacts of housing developments close to the lake shore are the major threats to the quality of the site and the rare species of plants and animals it supports. The blanket bog is vulnerable to peat extraction and

the risk of disturbance to the breeding sites of the important bird species is also a concern.

Sessiagh Lough is important because it comprises a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, i.e. oligotrophic to mesotrophic lake, and provides suitable habitats for Slender Naiad and for the Birds Directive Annex I species, Common Tern and Peregrine.