

Site Name: Coolcam Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000218

Coolcam Turlough lies in a complex area of eskers, south of Ballinlough, on the borders of Counties Galway and Roscommon,. It is a typical, wet, western turlough, with a semi-permanent lake with marl deposits, as well as several separate, more muddy basins which dry out in summer. The nearby eskers are sinuous, with a general north-south orientation - the turlough basin has this orientation also. The turlough has no permanent inflow but the main basin takes water from a boggy area to the north, and a smaller quantity from the south-west corner.

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*

The open water at the site has a central stand of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris* subsp. *lacustris*) and Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), but outside this, the marl community is well-developed, with Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Lesser Water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*) and Various-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton gramineus*) - the species most often found in lime-rich turloughs. Aquatic Stoneworts (*Chara* spp., including *C. hispida*) also occur. Another plant community which occurs in the wetter parts of the site includes Fine-leaved Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe aquatica*), Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*) and Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*).

Peat deposits occur around the shore and on rises within the basin, which are colonised by Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*), with associated herbs Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) and Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*). These species are widely found on similar sites in the Galway/Roscommon area. Other common species present include Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*). There is also some Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*) and a range of sedges (*Carex* spp., including abundant *Carex nigra*). The main basin terminates at the northern end in a cutover peaty area.

In the south-eastern corner, where the ground rises towards an esker, woodland occurs, with Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). Sweet-briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*) and Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*) are found along the edges, in the flood debris.

Bird counts carried out in summer 1990 indicate that Mallard, Lapwing, Whimbrel and Dunlin possibly breed at the site. Heron and Curlew have also been recorded.

Gravel pits exist on all sides of the turlough but they have not yet affected any of the eskers in the immediate vicinity. There is a large quarry to the south-east: activities here would influence the hydrology of the site should they extend below the water table. The turlough is grazed by cattle and sheep. There is little intensive farming in the region.

Coolcam Turlough is an exceptional site in a fine landscape setting which involves two of Ireland's most notable habitats - turlough and esker. It is one of the very few sites where these two features are juxtaposed. The site is little-damaged; the margins are fully intact, and the vegetation is diverse and natural in appearance. The proximity of other habitats to the turlough, especially bogland and partly wooded eskers adds to the value of the site, as it produces interesting transitional zones in the vegetation. Because of its wetness, Coolcam is an important site for birdlife. A survey of turloughs in Ireland rated Coolcam as the most valuable in the north Midlands, and rated it as being of international importance.