



**Site Name: Castletaylor Complex SAC**

**Site Code: 000242**

The Castletaylor Complex is situated approximately 4 km south-east of Kilcolgan in Co. Galway and lies in a gently undulating limestone topography. Although relatively small in area, the site contains a diverse range of habitats.

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*
[4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
[5130] Juniper Scrub
[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*
[8240] Limestone Pavement*

Caranavoodaun turlough dominates the north-western half of the site. It occupies a shallow basin set among ridges of limestone outcrop and thin glacial drift and is an excellent example of a calcareous and extremely oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) turlough. It has a limited throughput of water, with a considerable precipitation of marl and some accumulation of peat. Some stands of Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), with sparse Variegated Horsetail (*Equisetum variegatum*), occur at the upper levels, surrounded by patches of Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) scrub. To the south-east the scrub includes Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*). Below this there is an extensive area of sedge fen vegetation with species such as Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). Along the western and south-western sides the low-lying ground supports a community of Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Spike-rushes (*Eleocharis palustris* and *E. multiflora*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) growing in shallow water that persists into June. The deeper pools are colonised by Pondweeds (*Potamogeton gramineus*, *P. polygonifolius* and *P. coloratus*).

North of the turlough and to the south of the site there is a mosaic of other habitats. The limestone pavement occurs mainly as scattered boulders with no extensive areas of flat pavement. It has a rich flora with species such as Bloody Crane's-bill (*Geranium sanguinum*), Herb-Robert (*G. robertianum*), Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scordonia*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) and the scarce species Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*) and Mountain Avens (*Dryas*

*octopetala*). Limestone pavement breaks through the turlough floor in places, and supports scrub vegetation with Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*), Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*), stunted Ash and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). The Red Data book species Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) occurs amongst this community. Limestone outcrops also occur within the wooded area of the site.

The dry calcareous grassland that occurs amongst the limestone pavement and heath is species-rich, particularly with orchids, including Autumn Lady's tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*), Lesser Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) and the scarce Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*).

The heath at this site is characterised by the presence of Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and Mountain Avens. The presence of Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) indicates that some of the heath is similar to the Arctostaphylos-Dryas vegetation of the Burren limestone area, a rare lowland alpine type heath.

The eastern and much of the southern parts of the site are dominated by dry broadleaved woodland. Species present include Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Ash, Yew, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). Some mature planted conifers are found to the south of the road.

The turlough does not hold any significant wintering populations of birds, owing to the extreme oligotrophic conditions. Three pairs of Lapwing bred at the site in 1996.

The main land use within the open areas of the site is light grazing by cattle. Some clearance of scrub within parts of the woodland has caused some damage and is a further threat. This site is of high conservation interest, in particular for the presence in a relatively small area of good examples of five habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The transition from the wetland to the surrounding habitats is particularly well shown.