

Site Name: Levally Lough SAC

Site Code: 000295

Levally Lough is a fluctuating lake, or turlough, situated 9 km east of Tuam and to the north of the Grange River in Co. Galway. It is overlooked by a low rise on the north side, with some esker or drift mound to the south. The land is flat at the eastern and western ends. A stream enters the turlough from the north-east 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 southern shore of Levally Lough is peaty, with peaty grassland, as well as Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) where calcareous influences are stronger. Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) are widespread amongst other typical wetland species. An unusual Speedwell (*Veronica* sp.) hybrid is found near to seepage of groundwater, where Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) also occurs.

At the east and west ends of the turlough, there is less moisture and the ground is mainly covered by species-poor grassland with some willows (*Salix* sp.), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*). In the vicinity of swallow-holes, Amphibious Bistort becomes more abundant, occurring either as pure stands or mixed with grasses and Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*). The northern edge carries small areas of sedges (*Carex* spp.) mixed with Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) and Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*).

The main body of the lake appears to overlie a sheet of marl, and here, oligotrophic plants occur such as Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) and Stoneworts (*Chara* spp., including *C. curta*). The centre of the lake has been invaded by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), with Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) scattered throughout.

The site is well-known for its wildfowl because of the permanence of the water. Wintering wildfowl numbers from 10 counts during the season 1984/85 - 1986/87 were as follows: Wigeon 47, Teal 58, Mallard 28, Pochard 61, Tufted Duck 25, Golden Plover 75, Lapwing 91 and Curlew 102. The summer birds include Mallard, Coot, Moorhen, Lapwing and Black-headed Gull.

There is some grazing on the margins of the turlough, most significantly around the north-east corner. Pollution of the system with organic effluent from around the site would threaten the quality of this site. Drainage would also pose a threat to the hydrology of the site.

Levally Lough is of considerable ecological interest because it retains water most of the time, and therefore lies at one of the extremes of turlough variation for wetness. In this class, it is second only to Lough Funshinagh, Co. Roscommon. It is likely to support much more lake-like fauna than most turloughs, and its birdlife is richer than most. In addition, its structure is in a natural condition, and water quality seems good. The vegetation at this site is varied and unusual, and the areas of marl and reedbed here are the largest found in any turlough in a recent national survey.