

Site Name: Lough Rea SAC

Site Code: 000304

Lough Rea is a hard water lake situated directly south of the town of Loughrea, Co. Galway. The lake is 2.5 km at its longest axis. The underlying geology of the area is of Carboniferous limestone and water transparency is very high. The lake, which is fed by springs and by a stream, reaches a maximum depth of 15 m.

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):

[3140] Hard Water Lakes

Some species of stonewort (a type of alga) characteristic of calcareous waters have been recorded in Lough Rea, including *Chara curta* and *C. contraria*. The Red Data Book species *C. tomentosa* has also been found here. Other aquatic plants present include Slender-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton filiformis*), Lesser Pondweed (*P. pusillus*), Fennel Pondweed (*P. pectinatus*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium minimum*), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and the alga *Chaetomorpha incrassaton*. On the sheltered western and south-eastern shores of the lake some areas of reedswamp, wet grassland and wet woodland are included in the site.

Lough Rea is of considerable ornithological interest. Internationally important numbers of Shoveler overwinter at the site (max. 467, 1995/96) and nationally important numbers of Tufted Duck (max. 406, 1995/96) and Coot (max. 1256, 1996/97) have also been reported. A further 10 species of waterfowl reach regionally or locally important numbers. Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*) are present in the lake.

The site is largely surrounded by intensively farmed pasture and consequently the main threat to the lake comes from agricultural run-off. The lake is also vulnerable to nutrient input from the town of Loughrea. Boating activities may have some impact on the site and may need to be monitored. An area has been planted with conifers to the east of the lake, but this does not appear to be adversely affecting the ecology of the lake.

Lough Rea is a hard water lake, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The lake is also important for birds, and holds nationally and internationally important numbers of a number of species.