

Site Name: The Loughans SAC

Site Code: 000407

The Loughans is a turlough situated in flat land about 3 km east of Urlingford, below the Slieve Ardagh Hills, in Co. Kilkenny. The basin is slightly undulating, with banks and hummocks of glacial drift around which the water rises. It has a level floor for the most part, but swallow holes and subsidence hollows are present. The turlough floods regularly, despite some drainage. In summer, it retains a permanent central pond and there are several subsidiary wet hollows at the eastern end.

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*

Around the central pond at The Loughans there are plant species typical of fluctuating water levels, and Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) is common. Standing water is colonised by Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), water-crowfoot species (*Ranunculus aquatilis* and *R. trichophyllus*) and Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*). Some ponds have a floating scraw of vegetation formed by Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), speedwells (*Veronica scutellata* and *V. catenata*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*).

About half of the basin is semi-reclaimed pasture dominated by Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), with other agricultural grasses such as Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*) and White Clover (*Trifolium repens*). Elsewhere, there is a more natural turlough vegetation, rich in small sedges (*Carex nigra*, *C. disticha* and *C. hirta*), and grasses such as Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Wetland grasses such as Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*) are found in places, with a notable abundance of Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*). To the north, there is a gradation into drier, lime-rich grassland where a characteristic grassland community occurs, adding habitat diversity to the site.

Several rare and scarce plant species occur at The Loughans, including Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*) which occurs on the limestone grassland. Two other species listed in the Irish Red Data Book, Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) and Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*), occur here. A number of local rarities have also been recorded, including Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*), Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*) and Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*).

The Loughans is the only large turlough in the south-east of the country, and the highest anywhere in Ireland. It is therefore of high conservation value. It has limited physical variation but, for its size, a fairly diverse vegetation and habitats, including open water, ditches, extensive damp areas and a good transition to the high quality lime-rich grassland areas.