



**Site Name: Tory Hill SAC**

**Site Code: 000439**

Tory Hill is an isolated, wooded limestone hill situated about 2 km north-east of Croom, Co. Limerick. It represents an important feature of the surrounding countryside and is a prime example of a limestone hill set amongst a region of volcanic intrusions of differing shape and geology. The hill is of geomorphological interest for the end-moraine, left by retreating ice, on its northern flanks and for ice-marks that are clearly visible on the solid rock. The site includes Lough Nagirra and its associated wetland vegetation, located to the north and north-east of Tory Hill.

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):

[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland\*

[7210] *Cladium* Fens\*

[7230] Alkaline Fens

Tory Hill supports areas of scrub and woodland, with Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) comprising the main woody species found. The larger stands have a typical woodland flora. A well-developed limestone heath-scrub complex occurs on its western edge, which is very similar to the terrain found in the Burren region. This area is remarkable for its stand of Yew (*Taxus baccata*), a feature now rare in Ireland, and for its species-rich flora, which includes such calcium-loving plants as Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*) and Shining Crane's-bill (*Geranium lucidum*).

Areas of orchid-rich calcareous grassland are found on the eastern side of the hill and on its summit. A disused quarry also contains excellent examples of this grassland type. Four orchid species have been recorded here - Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*). Other plant species of calcareous grassland present in this habitat include Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Downy Oat-grass (*Avenula pubescens*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Fairy Flax, Quaking-grass and Yellow Oat-grass, amongst others. The presence of the scarce Bee Orchid is of particular note.

Lough Nagirra has a thick fringe of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and areas of alkaline fen and calcareous fen vegetation referable to the Caricion davallianae alliance with Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*). Both of these fen types are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, the latter with priority status.

A dense fringe of tall vegetation occurs around Lough Nagirra. Here, Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) is well-represented, along with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). The alkaline fen is relatively species-rich, with typical species including Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*), Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*C. lepidocarpa*), Common Sedge (*C. nigra*), Hairy Sedge (*C. hirta*), Glaucous Sedge (*C. flacca*), Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*D. fuchsii*), amongst others.

This site is of considerable conservation significance for the diversity of terrestrial and wetland habitats found within it, and particularly for the presence of good examples of three habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.