



Site Name: Ardkill Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000461

Ardkill turlough is situated about 7 km east of Ballinrobe in Co. Mayo, and is one of a group of five turloughs that occupy hollows in rolling countryside. It is set amongst low limestone knolls with drift around the south and east. Exposed limestone extends out across the northern part forming a central island with low cliffs. The basin has steep western sides but slopes more evenly to the east. There is much loose rock in the north-eastern part.

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*

At Ardkill turlough there is a deep pond at the western end of the basin which is of the order of 6 m below flood level. A shallower pond occurs in the south-eastern sector. In the south-west corner there is a swallow hole at the base of the slope just above floor level. Water also rises at the edge of the northern rock outcrop as a spring. There is no above-ground inflow to the basin. Peat has accumulated in the lower-lying parts of the site, with some accumulation of marl (calcium carbonate) on the rocks and other surfaces where the water is more permanent.

The vegetation is highly diverse for such a small area because of the great range of water level fluctuations and occurrence of bare rock. Characteristic turlough plant communities occur in distinct bands at various levels in the basin. At the topmost level there is a narrow fringe of limestone grassland. The sloping ground below this supports sedge-heath with Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*). Midslopes are dominated by Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) communities. The turlough floor is occupied by wet Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) vegetation. The main lake supports abundant Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and Great Yellow-creed (*Rorippa amphibia*).

The shallower pond also has much Amphibious Bistort along with Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*). This pond has a soft marly bed with abundant Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*) and Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*). The stone walls in this area are draped with a spectacular abundance of the moss *Fontinalis antipyretica* and Great Yellow-creed (*Rorippa amphibia*). The central parts of the island are not flooded and contain scrub with Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*), Ground Ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) and other species. At the flood line there is Bramble (*Rubus*

caesius), Downy Rose (*Rosa tomentosa*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*) and Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*).

Several pairs of Lapwing breed at the site, and Snipe and Common Sandpiper probably breed. The site is likely to attract wintering waterfowl.

The basin floods regularly to a considerable depth and has some water for many months of the year. No drainage attempts are apparent at present. Much of the area is closely grazed by cattle but the vegetation has not suffered unduly from this.

Arckill is unusual in Mayo for having such a large fluctuation in water depth (8-10 m), a long-lasting pond and exposed limestone on its shore. The variation in topography creates a good diversity of vegetation types within a small area. The site contains Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*), a species known only from this site in Co. Mayo, as well as a number of other uncommon species. A species of parasitic wasp (*Mesoleptus hibernica*) has been described as new to science from Arckill Turlough. Taken together, all these features combine to make it a site of high conservation value.