

**Site Name: Cross Lough (Killadoon) SAC**

**Site Code: 000484**

Cross Lough is located near Killadoon village, approximately 12 km south-west of Louisburgh, in Co. Mayo. This coastal site is of interest for its wide range of habitats, from sandy beach and shingle bank, to wet pasture, swamp and freshwater marsh.

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):

[1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
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Cross Lough lies above the foreshore, behind a shingle and boulder bar. The boulder beach is approximately 10-15 m in width, and the shingle, approximately 8 m. This is a high energy shoreline, and extends for almost 1 km. The vegetation here is considered typical for the 'perennial vegetation of stony banks' habitat found on the west coast of Ireland.

The lake lies on muddy sand and its waters are at times slightly saline (4 ppt salinity was measured in 1990). In certain years, a tidal channel connects Cross Lough to the sea, but this has been closed in recent times. Aquatic plants present include Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and stoneworts (*Chara* spp.). Beds of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) fringe the lakeshore, with Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*). In places, this vegetation merges landward into a swamp dominated by Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Patches of reedbed occur along the southern lakeshore, formed by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), with Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*).

Around the lake, particularly towards the southern end, areas of iron-enriched, wet pasture occur, dominated by Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Lesser Spearwort, Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) and Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*).

Throughout the site are scattered small fields with old cultivation ridges (or 'lazy beds'). In the northern part of the site, these fields support machair-type vegetation, i.e. close-cropped grassland on a sandy substrate.

Cross Lough is the site of a long-established Sandwich Tern colony (107 pairs in 1984; 70 pairs in 1995), which is located on a small islet within the lake. Recent counts (1998-99) suggest that the terns no longer breed at the site, possibly due to predation by feral mink. Black-headed Gulls also breed - 54 individuals were recorded in 1984; 70 pairs in 1995 - and there are small numbers of breeding Common Gull (c. 10 pairs).

The site is used for grazing cattle and sheep. Extraction of beach material poses a significant threat to coastal habitats of this type.

Cross Lough is a fine example of a freshwater coastal lake which, at times, may become lagoonal. Of particular note is the presence of a well-developed shingle-boulder ridge - vegetated ridges such as this are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Its importance for seabirds, together with the range of additional coastal habitats present, enhances the conservation value of this site.