

Site Name: Skealaghan Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000541

Skealaghan turlough is situated about 5 km from Ballinrobe in Co. Mayo and is one of a group of five turloughs that occupy hollows in rolling countryside. It lies close to the catchment divide between the River Robe (which is 3.2 km away and has been arterially drained) and the Cross River which flows to Lough Corrib.

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*

Most of Skealaghan Turlough has a peaty soil which varies from 0-85 cm thick and rests on calcareous sand. There is some semi-permanent standing water at the eastern end where peat cutting has exposed the underlying marl (calcium carbonate), and this is fed from natural ponds and ditches to the west. The southern part dries out completely in summer and is bordered by a woodland fringe, which includes Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*).

The vegetation of the turlough is quite diverse. The waterbody at the eastern end consists of winding channels filled with Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*). The pond edges are colonised by the pondweeds *Potamogeton natans*, *P. crispus* and *P. coloratus*, along with Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*). Outside this area, the nutrient-poor conditions support a sedge-heath type vegetation, dominated by sedges (*Carex hostiana* and *C. panicea*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*), an uncommon fen plant, occurs amongst this vegetation type. At higher levels, the vegetation includes Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*). The deeper soil in the southern section carries an expanse of Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*).

Several pairs of Lapwing breed at the site and some wintering waterfowl are likely to visit the turlough.

The turlough floods frequently and no drainage attempts are apparent. Much of the area is closely grazed by cattle, as is common in many turloughs, but the vegetation has not suffered unduly from this, especially in the wetter areas. Peat cutting was terminated many years ago after a small amount was removed. Despite some intensive agriculture to the west of the site, the area remains quite oligotrophic.

Skealaghan Turlough is of conservation interest for its diversity of vegetation types, particularly the oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) sedge communities.