

Site Name: Ballinturly Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000588

Ballinturly Turlough is situated in a v-shaped basin just north of Athleague in Co. Roscommon. It is a very large site stretching westwards for 2.5 km from the road, and opening out at the western end over large fields. Bedrock is exposed at the north-eastern end, and elsewhere the edges of the basin are frequently strewn with loose rocks. The basin floor is mainly flat, but west of centre is a depression in which there is a shallow lake.

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):

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| [3180] Turloughs* |
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There are a large number of vegetation types in this turlough, and these vary from wet to dry, and from peaty to rocky. The main vegetation type on the floor of the turlough is dominated by a mixture of Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Hairy Sedge (*C. hirta*), accompanied by Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and the moss, *Drepanocladus exannulatus*. In peatier places there is some Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*) and Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*). Where flooding occurs more frequently Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) and Lesser Marshwort (*Apium inundatum*) are prominent. Depressions within this community, either in the central hollows or in marginal channels, are mostly lined by Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). At its upper edge of the northern limb of the turlough a purer stand of Common Sedge occurs, with damp grassland above it. In stonier parts, vegetation dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) is found also.

The lake area consists of Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) mixed with Fen Pondweed (*Potamogeton coloratus*), Lesser Water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) and Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*). These are surrounded by extensive beds of Tufted-sedge (*Carex elata*), Common Sedge, Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and a little Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Slender Tufted-sedge (*Carex acuta*). On the south-west side the land rises and is covered by Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and a little Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*). Old areas of peat cutting are found in this area and to the west, and support a varied assemblage of plant species and communities.

The south-eastern corner of the turlough has a build-up of peat over land that was formerly flooded. Here there is a large area of poached peat with Brown Sedge, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), and a smaller area of cutover peat dominated by Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Purple Moor-grass and Meadow Thistle. Woodland is present only in the south-western part of the site, where Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), along with a little Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*), is scattered on dry ground.

Lapwing and Snipe nest in the area, and the site is also used by post-breeding flocks and migrating populations of birds, i.e. Black-tailed Godwit (105), Whooper Swan (18), Greenland White-fronted Goose (71), Wigeon (899), Teal (303), Mallard (37), Pintail (49), Shoveler (24), Tufted Duck (18), Lapwing (303) and Curlew (86). Figures in parentheses are the average of five counts during two seasons in the period 1984/85-1986/87. Pintail, Shoveler, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Whooper Swan and Black-tailed Godwit are listed in the Red Data Book and, the latter three species, on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Ballinturly Turlough is the fourth largest active turlough still extant in Ireland. It is an exceptional site which contains a wide range of habitat types, vegetation communities and plant species. A special feature of the site is that despite a seasonal connection with the River Suck, the groundwater is oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) enough to support normally calcifuge plants. The site is little damaged by grazing, which occurs over most of it, and there is little internal drainage. Areas formerly cut for peat are largely re-generating and support a diversity of vegetation types. Overall, human impact on the site is generally low. Turloughs are listed, with priority status, on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive and, as such, are of considerable conservation significance. The large wintering bird population adds substantially to the importance of the site.