



Site Name: Lough Croan Turlough SAC

Site Code: 000610

Lough Croan turlough is located south of the Athlone to Mount Talbot road in Co. Roscommon. It is a linear wetland, aligned north-west/south-east, which lies in a relatively flat area of glacial till. It is split into two main parts - the east functions as a typical turlough, with a wet area dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) at the centre; at the west is a fen, with floating vegetation in places, which also floods in winter. In between there is undulating ground. There is little over-ground flow, but both basins retain some water all year round.

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*

Lough Croan Turlough is a large, complex site which supports a multitude of vegetation types. The midline of the turlough is generally the wettest ground and, particularly in the western half of the site, there are beds of Common Reed, with Tufted-sedge (*Carex elata*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*). Cowbane (*Cicuta virosa*), Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*), Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) and Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) are frequent, and there are occasional clumps of Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*). Drains on the site support aquatic vegetation, with Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Whorled Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum verticillatum*) and Lesser Pondweed (*Potamogeton pusillus*).

At the eastern end a larger waterbody holds similar vegetation, with substantial areas of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), Tufted-sedge and Bogbean, mixed with Brached bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) and Yellow Iris. On the southern side a distinct band of annual plants follows the edge of the sedges on the whitish mud. Here the rare, Red Data Book species Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*) occurs frequently, along with Marsh Cudweed (*Gnaphalium uliginosum*), Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*) and Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius*).

Outside of these wet areas the turlough bottom is covered with sedge-dominated vegetation, particularly Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*); the occurrence here of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*) reflect the high peat content of the soil. Peat is especially thick at the western end where Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*), Bogbean, Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) and Water Horsetail are scattered

through vegetation of Common Sedge, Bottle Sedge and Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*). An area of sedge fen with Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), a little Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) is also found here.

Around the margins grassland is the most common habitat; calcareous grassland at the southern end where the shore rises abruptly, but elsewhere grassland which is more nutrient-enriched and generally species-poor.

Lough Croan is an important ornithological site and is a Wildfowl Sanctuary. The following species use the site (except where indicated, numbers are the average of 11 counts over 3 seasons, 1984/85-1986/87): Shoveler (154), Wigeon (483), Gadwall (10, 1 count), Teal (473), Mallard (32), Pintail (17), Coot (42), Lapwing (445; 2,600 in 1988), Curlew (103), Golden Plover (160; occasionally numbers between 1000 and 3000 are recorded), Whooper Swan (11) and Bewick's Swan (18, 1 count). Pochard (6 breeding pairs in 1991), Shoveler (proved breeding in 1993), Mute Swan and Black-headed Gull also occur at the site and nest, as do Snipe, Curlew and Lapwing. Greenland White-fronted Goose regularly utilise this turlough for feeding and, when water is high, for roosting. These birds are part of the River Suck population. Numbers vary, but in most winters between 150 and 300 individuals are recorded. Short-eared Owl has once been recorded from the site; this species, Whooper Swan, Golden Plover and Greenland White-fronted Goose are listed in the Red Data Book and, along with Bewick's Swan, on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Lough Croan Turlough is an unusual wetland that contains fen, reedswamp and turlough vegetation communities in juxtaposition. The vegetation is highly diverse, with a total of 17 different communities occurring, several of which are rare or unusually large in extent. The site is notable for the presence of the rare, Northern Yellow-cress, which occurs frequently. The wintering waterfowl numbers are large and the site is especially useful to dabbling duck species. This is an important site because of its overall size, its birdlife and the rare plant communities and species it supports. Turloughs are rare and threatened habitats that are listed, with priority status, on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive and, as such, are of considerable conservation significance.