

Site Name: Lough Funshinagh SAC

Site Code: 000611

Lough Funshinagh is located approximately 12 km north-west of Athlone, in Co. Roscommon. The lake, which is underlain by Carboniferous limestone, is classified as a turlough because it fluctuates to a significant extent every year and occasionally dries out entirely (approximately two to three times every ten years). In most years, however, an extensive area of water persists. This is filled with vegetation, providing excellent breeding habitat for wildfowl, and the site is designated a Wildfowl Sanctuary. The lake is fed by springs and a small catchment to the west. It is mesotrophic in quality, with some marl (calcium carbonate) deposition, and is surrounded by pastures.

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*
[3270] <i>Chenopodium rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention</i> p.p. vegetation

Open water at Lough Funshinagh is colonised by large beds of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*). This grades into stands of Tufted-sedge (*Carex elata*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) in some areas, and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) at the main inflow. The shallower parts of the lake contain semi-aquatic plants which are variably exposed in summer. Common here are Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), with Water Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa*). Other turlough communities here, and on the parts of the shore inundated by high waters, include such species as Various-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton gramineus*), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*), Marsh Cudweed (*Gnaphalium uliginosum*), the moss *Fontinalis antipyretica* and Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*), a rare species which is listed in the Irish Red Data Book. Vegetation ascribable to the E.U. Habitats Directive Annex I type 'rivers with muddy banks with *Chenopodium rubri* p.p. and *Bidention* p.p. vegetation' occurs. Marl deposits with stoneworts (*Chara* spp.) also occur in the shallow water. Internally, the vegetation shows considerable patterning, presumably related to nutrient conditions.

The lake is fringed by wet grassland, with species such as Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), which in turn grades into pasture. A number of islands occur on the eastern

side which are never totally flooded. They support Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub, whose lower limit is controlled by the winter flooding.

Lough Funshinagh is important for wintering waterfowl. The following figures are derived from 13 counts over 3 seasons (1984/85-1986/87). Included among the regular winter visitors are three species which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Bewick's Swan (4, becoming scarcer since 1987), Whooper Swan (10) and Golden Plover (50), as well as Wigeon (310), Teal (263), Mallard (181), Shoveler (17), Pochard (82), Tufted Duck (52), Coot (42), Lapwing (67) and Curlew (29). In summer, the site attracts a good diversity of breeding waterfowl. Species which breed, probably regularly, at the site include Shoveler, Gadwall and Pochard, while Black-necked Grebe and Pintail may breed sporadically - all of these are listed as rare in the Red Data Book. Lapwing and Snipe are regular breeders, and sometimes also Redshank and Ringed Plover. Lough Funshinagh is one of the sites used by the River Suck flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose. Nowadays, however, it is not regularly used, possibly because some of the former feeding areas have become overgrown with scrub.

The Common Frog, a species listed in the Red Data Book as internationally important, breeds within the site. Although widespread and common in Ireland, this species is considered to be vulnerable in Europe. Its habitat is threatened by drainage of wetlands and water pollution.

Some of the major threats to lakes in Ireland arise from drainage and agricultural intensification. In the case of the latter, the application of fertiliser can lead to eutrophication and a general loss of species diversity. Lough Funshinagh is currently mesotrophic, but it has been described in the past as being full of vegetation. Thus it may be that it has not been enriched significantly by agricultural run-off in recent times. There are localised eutrophic patches around the shores where grazing animals congregate, but the lake water is strikingly clear. There have been attempts at drainage in the past, most recently in 1990. As yet, this has resulted in little structural damage to the site.

Lough Funshinagh is of major ecological importance, both from a vegetation and ornithological viewpoint. Turloughs are listed as priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Lough Funshinagh is a unique and atypical example of this habitat, and has a particular value in being relatively unmodified by grazing and modern agriculture.