

**Site Name: Templehouse and Cloonacleigha Loughs SAC**

**Site Code: 000636**

This site is located approximately 5 km north-west of Ballymote, Co. Sligo. It comprises three shallow, hard water lakes - Templehouse Lough, Cloonacleigha Lough and Killawee Lough - which are inter-connected by the Owenmore river. The lakes are situated on Carboniferous limestone, but are surrounded by low, peat-covered hills.

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):

[3140] Hard Water Lakes [3260] Floating River Vegetation
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Templehouse and Cloonacleigha Loughs support a wide diversity of wetland communities including floating and submerged aquatic habitats, tall fen vegetation, carr and wet woodland. Other habitats within the site are mixed woodland, lowland wet grassland, raised bog and cut-away bog.

The emergent vegetation of the lakes includes Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), Slender Tufted-sedge (*Carex acuta*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) and River Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fluviatilis*). Yellow and White Water-lilies (*Nuphar lutea* and *Nymphaea alba*) and Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*) dominate the floating vegetation. Five species of stonewort have been recorded from Cloonacleigha Lough: *Chara aspera*, *C. contraria*, *C. rudis*, *C. virgata* and *C. vulgaris* var. *longibracteata*, with the last-named also occurring in Templehouse Lough. Other submerged species present include Perfoliate Pondweed (*Potamogeton perfoliatus*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and Canadian Waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*). Also present along the shore of Cloonacleigha Lough are areas of fen and scraw (floating vegetation) which are rich in sedges (e.g. *Carex lasiocarpa*, *C. aquatilis*, *C. acuta*), along with fen pastureland with Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and Tall Fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*).

Mixed woodland occurs on the northern shores of Templehouse Lough. The dominant tree species are Pendunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*); small amounts of Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*) are also present. A dense understorey of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) occurs in some parts. Both the Beech and Ash are extensively regenerating. Areas of more natural woodland with birch (*Betula*

*pubescens* and *B. pendula*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*), Eared Willow (*S. aurita*), Bay Willow (*S. pentandra*), Ash and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) also occur. The Red Data Book species Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*) is known from the Templehouse area and may occur within the site. Epiphytic lichens such as Cup-moss (*Cladonia pyxidata*) and beard-mosses (*Usnea* spp.) are abundant here. Ground flora species recorded include Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*).

The stretch of Owenmore River included in the site is meandering and slow-moving and hosts a diverse flora which achieves up to 80% coverage in places. Species present include Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Yellow Water-lily, Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), starworts (*Callitriche* spp.), River Water-dropwort and the non-native Monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*). Tall fen vegetation, with stands of Common Reed, an abundance of sedges and a herb layer which includes the Red Data Book species Marsh Pea (*Lathyrus palustris*) occurs along the river.

The complex of loughs, woodland and river channels makes this an important site for birds, especially wintering waterfowl e.g. Teal, Wigeon, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Goldeneye. There is also a relatively large wader population, including Lapwing, Curlew and small numbers of Greenland White-fronted Goose, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Many bird species breed in the area, including Mute Swan and Great Crested Grebe, and the largest heronry in Co. Sligo, supporting approximately 16 breeding pairs, is found on the shore of Templehouse Lough. Furthermore, a population of Woodcock is managed for shooting on the Templehouse estate.

Besides shooting, the area is used for coarse fishing and boating. Some agricultural land is included in the site and this is extensively grazed by sheep, and less so by cattle, and some hay is also cropped.

Potential threats to the site include: water pollution from domestic and agricultural sources; over-grazing of lough fringe vegetation and woodland ground flora; field drainage; peat cutting; and afforestation. A section of wetland has already been damaged by the construction of several large drains and some of its margins have been cut for turbary. Some conifer afforestation has also taken place.

A proposed drainage scheme for the Owenmore River, if implemented, would pose a major threat to the area. This would result in both habitat loss and changes in the structure and species composition of some habitats. These events could also affect the bird and mammal populations and possibly result in the loss of some of the rare and specialised plants found at the site.

Templehouse Lough, Cloonacleigha Lough and Killawee Lough, along with the Owenmore River, are an integral part of a scenic landscape. Within the site there is a

diverse range of habitats, both aquatic and terrestrial, including two which are listed in the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site supports a range of uncommon plant species (some of these at their only known station for Co. Sligo), and most notably Marsh Pea. Furthermore, the site is of regional importance for birds. Overall it is of considerable conservation value.