



Site Name: Rusheenduff Lough SAC

Site Code: 001311

Rusheenduff Lough is a small coastal lake located 3 km north-west of Tully Cross, Co. Galway. It is separated from the sea by a narrow shingle bar which forms part of the site. It is a shallow lake, not exceeding 3 m in depth, and its bed is stony around the edges. The geology of the area is dominated by resistant gneisses.

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):

[3130] Oligotrophic to Mesotrophic Standing Waters

[1833] Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*)

Rusheenduff Lough is an oligotrophic to mesotrophic lake, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It supports a range of aquatic plant species that includes several rarities. Along the shallow stony lake edge the dominant species are Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*) and Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), with some Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*) also found. On the north-western shore there are small areas of freshwater marsh with Purple-loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*) and Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*). In the deeper waters towards the centre of the lake there are large beds of stoneworts (*Nitella* spp.) and Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*). Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*), a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, is also found here. The lake supports a population of Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*). This is a very rare species in Ireland, being known from only one other site – a recently discovered population in another west Galway lake. This species has a disjunct distribution in Europe, its nearest extant sites being in north-east Germany and Poland. Both Slender Naiad and Hydrilla are listed in the Irish Red Data Book and are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015.

Bordering the lake to its south-west is an area that includes a mosaic of habitats including dry grassland, heath, wet grassland and freshwater marsh.

The shingle beach to the north-west of the lough is included within the site both for its intrinsic habitat interest and for its importance in the maintenance of the existing hydrological conditions within the lough. Breaches of the shingle bar by the sea would lead to an alteration in the salinity of the waters of the lough and would threaten the survival of the rare and unusual vegetation communities there. Eutrophication of the lough waters through run-off from surrounding farmland or through the discharge of domestic sewage would also pose a threat.

Rusheenduff Lough is an important site as it comprises a good example of an oligotrophic to mesotrophic lake and supports populations of the rare plant species Slender Naiad and Hydrilla. The presence of Pipewort in the lake is also of note; lakes in the Connemara region hold the largest European populations of this predominantly North American species.