

Site Name: Termon Lough SAC

Site Code: 001321

Termon Lough SAC is situated approximately 6 km south-west of Gort, on the border between Counties Clare and Galway. It consists of a series of three turloughs, with low, drift-covered slopes on all sides except in the north-east, where a small area of limestone pavement is found. The turloughs are hydrologically linked at times of high water. Termon Lough itself is now largely a reedswamp, and is underlain by marl deposits. This is a particularly wet turlough system which seldom dries out.

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*

The central part of the Termon Lough turlough supports Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Tufted-sedge (*Carex elata*) growing in a dense bed. Around the edges, this swamp vegetation gives way to vegetation where Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) becomes common. This marginal vegetation contains abundant Various-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton gramineus*), with Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) and Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*), and grades landward into tufts of Small-fruited Yellow-sedge (*Carex serotina*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). At the western end there are slightly richer conditions and Lesser Marshwort (*Apium inundatum*), Common Spike-rush (*E. palustris*) and Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*) occur. The edges of the basin elsewhere support a narrow band of relatively dry fen.

The northern-most section, known as Rosemeade, is a sinuous depression, itself leading into several further linear depressions to the north. The basin floor has a uniform vegetation of Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Hairy Sedge (*C. hirta*). Much of the western shore of this basin carries a low woodland of Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*).

Termon North, the basin found between Rosemeade and Termon Lough, is centred on a long-lasting pond. Here, there is almost complete cover of Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*) and Amphibious Bistort, mixed with other pondweeds. Around this on the soft mud are found Common Spike-rush, Floating Sweet-grass

(*Glyceria fluitans*) and Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*). Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) is found in places, commonly near the exposed rock on the south-eastern shore. The rare annual Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) can also be found here. This species is listed for protection in the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999. Above these areas the shoreline vegetation is variable. The north-western side is steeply sloping so that spike-rushes are backed by Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Hairy Sedge, Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and occasional Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*). On the opposite side the shore is lower and obviously stony. The southern shore is flatter with a slightly peaty surface and here a typical Common Sedge community is found. Higher levels in the south-eastern fields have a damp grassland vegetation dominated by Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*). Scrub of Hawthorn, Buckthorn, Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*), with a little Ash and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is found on the north-western edge.

The site is important for the presence of the turlough specialist *Eurycercus glacialis* (Order Cladocera). This species is confined to the turloughs of east Galway and west Clare.

Overall the three turloughs provide habitat for a good diversity of wintering wildfowl. All of the populations are at the level of local or regional importance. The species of most significance is the Whooper Swan, though the regular presence of diving duck is also of note. Maximum counts for the two winters 1996/97 and 1998/99 are as follows: 63 Whooper Swan, 162 Wigeon, 40 Tufted Duck, 237 Pochard and 350 Lapwing. Termon South provides excellent habitat for breeding birds. Of note is the presence of Great Crested Grebes (4 pairs in 1996 and possibly 5 pairs in 1999), Tufted Duck, Black-headed Gull and especially Pochard (of national importance). The presence of Pochard on several occasions is considered indicative of breeding, with at least three pairs present through the 1996 season and courtship behaviour observed. It is estimated that there are not more than 30 pairs in the country, with the bulk of these in Northern Ireland. Other birdlife noted from the site includes Snipe, Coot and Mallard.

Land use at the site is mainly agricultural. Agricultural improvement in the form of field enlargement, fertilisation and scrub removal has occurred in a number of places, and particularly around Termon North, and at the northern and western edge of Termon Lough. Cattle are out-wintered at the north of the site and there are ring-feeders and clamped silage in at least three areas quite close to the turlough.

These three turloughs are of considerable ecological importance. Termon North is of particular interest because of the differing character of its two component basins. They seem to differ in trophic status, lime precipitation and water table, and there is consequent difference in grazing regime and associated birdlife. Termon Lough is an unusual turlough by virtue of its extreme wetness – the water table is high for a long period in winter and the marginal areas dry out late. There is also considerable marl deposition, which adds to the overall diversity of the vegetation. It contains one of the largest stands of reedswamp to be found in a turlough, and this represents a

relatively rare oligotrophic vegetation community on marl. The vegetation is in excellent condition and almost completely ungrazed. The transition to limestone pavement in the north-eastern corner of the site is also of interest.