

Site Name: Cloonee and Inchiquin Loughs, Uragh Wood SAC

Site Code: 001342

Cloonee and Inchiquin Loughs, Uragh Wood SAC is located in a large U-shaped glacial valley on the northern side of the Caha Mountain range, to the west of Kenmare, Co. Kerry. It encompasses a series of four large lakes, some smaller mountain lakes, several inter-connecting rivers and streams, and the oak woodlands at Uragh Wood.

The Cloonee Lough system comprises three lowland oligotrophic lakes. The lowest of these is situated close to the Kenmare River estuary and is connected to the middle and upper lakes via the Beal-na-Shannin River. The upper Cloonee Lough is linked by the Ameen River to Inchiquin Lough. Uragh Wood, which is designated as a Nature Reserve, is situated on the south-west edge of Inchiquin Lough on craggy ground which rises steeply from 50 m to 200 m. Above the wood the land rises to nearly 500 m at Knockreagh Mountain. The site also includes two smaller lakes on the hillside, Lough Napeasta and Lough Cummeenadillure, to encompass the catchment area for the lakes below. The underlying geology of the area is Old Red Sandstone.

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):

- [3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals
- [4010] Wet Heath
- [4030] Dry Heath
- [8220] Siliceous Rocky Slopes
- [91A0] Old Oak Woodlands

- [1024] Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*)
- [1303] Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)
- [1421] Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*)
- [1833] Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*)

The water of the lakes at this site is acidic. The submerged flora contains such species as Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*), Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*), Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*), Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*) and Intermediate Bladderwort (*Utricularia intermedia*), amongst others. Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) occur around the lake margins in places. Drier areas support Blue-eyed-grass (*Sisyrinchium bermudiana*). The site is

notable for the presence of the rare, aquatic plant species, Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*), a protected species listed on the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015, the Red Data Book, and Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) and Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), both rare, Red Data Book and also legally protected, plant species, have also been recorded from the site.

Uragh Wood is a fine example of an oceanic, semi-natural oak woodland. The soil is generally shallow, being a brown podsol near the lake and more of a peaty podsol on the upland edge of the wood. The wood has an open structure that is dominated by Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). Other tree species present include Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*). An understorey of Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is present, with Aspen (*Populus tremula*) also occurring in some parts. Nearer to the lakeshore, the uncommon species Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) and Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) occur, along with occasional Yew (*Taxus baccata*). There is a heathland element to the ground flora of the wood that includes such species as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). In places the ground vegetation is relatively species-poor and dominated by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) or Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*), a rare, legally protected Red Data Book species and one that is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive as well as the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015, occurs in the wood. Other ferns commonly found in the wood include the Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and Filmy Ferns (*Hymenophyllum* spp.). The scarce Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) has been recorded from the wood.

This site is of international importance for its hyper-oceanic woodland bryophytes. Species present include: *Cyclodictyon laetevirens*, *Lejeunea flava*, *L. holtii*, *Hypnum uncinatum*, *Radula holtii*, *R. voluta*, *Sematophyllum demissum* and *S. micans*. A rare lichen, *Leptogium juressianum*, is also found here, in its only known Irish site. The rare Myxomycete fungus, *Stemonitis nigrescens*, has been recorded from woodland at Cloonee Lough.

The surrounding lands are generally a mixture of exposed sandstone rock, with extensive areas of wet or dry heath communities, with deeper peat areas of blanket bog. Here, Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora fusca*) and Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) are amongst the many typical peatland species found. Some of the adjacent fields also contain scarce plants such as Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), Yellow Bartsia (*Parentucellia viscosa*) and Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*).

Uragh Wood supports a diverse fauna and is especially rich in invertebrates. Of particular interest is the presence of the Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*), a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Populations of Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), a Red Data Book fish species, occur in both Inchiquin and Cloonee Loughs. A further Annex II species, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, occurs within the

site. A summer roost of more than 100 bats was discovered in a disused cottage at Glaninchiquin in 1999, making it a site of international importance. The building is currently in good condition. The surrounding landscape, which includes a conifer plantation, oak woodland, lake and improved grassland, provides good foraging habitat for the bats. The site also supports breeding Peregrine, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Much of the woodland within the site has now been fenced to prevent grazing by sheep and feral goats. Grazing by deer within the wood has not, however, been prevented and this still continues. The lakes within the site are vulnerable to eutrophication, e.g. through fertilizer run-off from the surrounding land. The scarce plant species found in the fields within the site are vulnerable to alterations in land use practices, such as agricultural intensification/improvement. The major threat to the site, however, is afforestation; some of the area has already been planted with Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and larch (*Larix* spp.).

Considering its relatively small size, this site contains a great diversity of species including many rarities. The site is of particular conservation significance because it contains good examples of five habitats and four species that are listed on the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site also supports breeding Peregrine, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, and is internationally important for its suite of hyper-oceanic woodland bryophytes.