



Site Name: Urlaur Lakes SAC

Site Code: 001571

Urlaur Lakes SAC comprises three small hard water lakes - Lough Nanoge, Lough Roe and Urlaur Lough. They lie in the upper catchment of the Lung River, a major tributary of the Boyle River. The site is located approximately 10 km north of Ballyhaunis in Co. Mayo.

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

All three lakes at this site lie on marl. The aquatic flora is dominated by stoneworts (*Chara* spp.), but other aquatic species also occur, e.g. Canadian Waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*), Yellow and White Water-lilies (*Nuphar lutea* and *Nymphaea alba*), pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.) and Common Duckweed (*Lemna minor*).

Swamps and reedbeds fringe the open water in places. These are generally dominated by Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris* subsp. *lacustris*) with occasional Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). At the western end of Lough Roe is an extensive quaking area of swamp vegetation. Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) are common here and willows (*Salix* spp.) are colonising in places. The shorelines consist of shallow mineral soils with flush vegetation dominated by Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). In most cases, this is backed by agricultural grassland. Elsewhere the shoreline is peaty and is backed by cut-away bog or flush/marsh vegetation. Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) are abundant on the cut-away. In some places there is flushed, species-rich heath with Lesser Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*).

A steep-sided ridge runs for a short distance along the eastern end of Lough Roe, and supports calcareous grassland vegetation. Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*), Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Downy Oat-grass (*Avenula pubescens*) occur here.

The following bird species have been recorded on these lakes in locally important numbers: Teal, Mallard, Pochard, Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Tufted Duck and Curlew. These figures are based counts made during the period 1984/85 and 1986/87.

Land use practices within the site boundary are of low intensity. The shoreline may be accessible to grazers from the adjacent pasture. Some mechanical turf-cutting is ongoing in the areas of cut-away to the south-east of Urlaur Lough. The lakes provide an important local amenity for fishing and are well regarded by the local community. Input of organic wastes (slurry, fertiliser, etc.) would cause eutrophication and a reduction of the water quality of these lakes. Intensive drainage could also threaten this site.

These three calcareous lakes are excellent examples of hard water lakes, a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. They contain a range of habitats and a good diversity of plant species, as well as providing breeding and feeding grounds for a range of wildfowl species. They are, in addition, an important and very scenic local amenity.