

Site Name: White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC

Site Code: 001810

White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC is comprised of four hard water lakes in a small, poorly-drained valley, 4 km east of Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath.

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 [1092] White-clawed Crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>)
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A curious feature of the site is the contrast between Lough Doo and the other loughs. Although they are in close proximity and are connected by a ditch, Lough Doo has a very limited aquatic and marginal flora while all the rest are colonised by a wide, dense fringe of Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) swamp.

The bottom of Lough Doo is covered by an unusually extensive mat of stonewort species (*Chara* spp.), with a few sparse stands of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). The calcium-rich water has deposited marl on the lake bed and over the stoneworts themselves. The presence of stoneworts in such abundance is significant as many of these species are threatened by loss of habitat or by pollution.

Areas of wet woodland dominated by willows (*Salix* spp.) fringe some of the lakes, and elsewhere wet grassland and freshwater marsh occur. In places peat formation and acidification is indicated by the presence of heath species. Some of the steeper slopes around the lakes are covered with scrub or small areas of broadleaf woodland.

The White-clawed Crayfish, a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive and protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976, has been recorded from these lakes.

This site is of considerable conservation significance for its hard water lakes and for the occurrence of White-clawed Crayfish. The variety of habitats within this valley and the contrasting vegetation types add further to its interest.