

Site Name: Lough Bane and Lough Glass SAC

Site Code: 002120

This site is located on the Meath/Westmeath border, about 10 km south of Oldcastle. It comprises three lakes situated in a shallow valley. Lough Bane is by far the largest of the group, with the much smaller Lough Glass occurring immediately to the east and Lough Glass North to the north-west. The lakes occur at the headwaters of the River Deel, with the main outflow at the south-east end of Lough Bane. The outflow is not very substantial and partly overgrown with vegetation. The connection between Lough Glass and Lough Bane has now been severed and the flow from Lough Glass is diverted to the south-west. The water level has dropped over the years and has exposed soft marl along parts of the shore.

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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Lough Bane is a good example of a hard water marl lake with well developed stonewort (*Chara* spp.) communities. Sampling of the aquatic flora has shown the presence of at least four species of Charophyte, i.e. *Chara rudis* (dominant in deep water), *C. curta* (shallow water at north shore), *C. globularis* and *C. contraria* (both mid-south shore).

Much of the shoreline of the lakes has a fringe of wetland vegetation, mostly Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), but also some Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*). At the east and west ends of Lough Bane the swamp vegetation is particularly well developed and there is also fen vegetation. Species include Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Water-cress (*Nasturtium officinale*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Devils'-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*).

Mixed woodland occurs along parts of the south and north shores. Species present include Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), oak (*Quercus* sp.), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and European Larch (*Larix decidua*). In some areas Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) becomes dominant, along with other shrubby species such as Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).

Dry calcareous grassland (mostly unimproved) is found in a few areas, notably at Noggin Hill. Species present here include Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and the grasses *Briza media* and *Cynosurus cristatus*.

The lake has Brown Trout and is an important angling lake. An important population of White-clawed Crayfish was known from these lakes, but this species disappeared from the site in the 1980s following what is considered to have been an outbreak of crayfish fungus plague (*Aphanomyces astaci*). The National Parks and Wildlife Service has a desire to see the White-clawed Crayfish population re-established in Lough Bane should habitat conditions be assessed as suitable.

The lakes and fringing wetlands support a varied avifauna, including Little Grebe, Cormorant, Lapwing, Curlew and Snipe.

Despite being surrounded by mostly improved pasture, the quality of the water appears good and Lough Bane has been classified as a very oligotrophic system. However, as it is a small water body and situated in a valley, it is vulnerable to water pollution. A further threat comes from afforestation within the catchment - should there be an increase in the areas under commercial forestry, the quality of the water could be affected.

Overall, this is a fine example of a hard water marl lake system with good *Chara* communities. Such systems are becoming scarce in Europe.