



Site Name: Lough Nageage SAC

Site Code: 002135

Lough Nageage is situated to the east of Lough Derg, and approximately 5 km north east of Pettigo in the south of Co. Donegal. This small site contains three lakes, the highest of which lies at an altitude of 181 m. The lakes lie in a basin, surrounded by gently sloping ground, underlain by bedrocks of Lower Avonian Shales and Sandstones. The surrounding soils are predominantly thin peats, with a greater depth of peat accumulated on flatter ground.

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):

[1092] White-clawed Crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>)

White-clawed Crayfish is the only species of crayfish found in Ireland, where it is protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976. It is classified as a vulnerable and rare species in the IUCN Red List of threatened animals, it is listed as a protected faunal species in Appendix III of the Bern Convention, and is also listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The first and only record for White-clawed Crayfish from Co. Donegal was made at Lough Nageage in August 1991. The species was recorded again in June 1998 when large populations were noted in both Lough Nageage and Lough Veenagreane. Females carrying young were also reported. The altitude of these lakes, 165 m and 181 m respectively, are noteworthy as White-clawed Crayfish are rare at altitudes above 150 m.

Lough Nageage and Lough Veenagreane have sandy lakebeds, with small boulders and pebbles present. Several streams feed into these lakes. The emergent vegetation around the shores is sparse, with Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*), Jointed Rush (*J. articulatus*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). Lough Naveane, the smallest of the lakes, has a peaty bottom and the water is stained with humic acids giving it an orange appearance.

The dominant habitat surrounding these lakes is wet heath, with species such as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), occasional Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), lichens *Cladonia uncialis* and *C. portentosa*, and many mosses including bog mosses

(*Sphagnum* spp.). Blanket bog has developed on the flatter areas with species such as Heather, Cross-leaved Heath, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), White Beak-sedge, Deergrass and in one location, Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*).

Much of the site has been afforested and the planted areas have been extensively drained. There are deciduous whips (young trees) planted around the perimeter of the plantations, which are often planted within 15 m of the margins of the lakes. There are also a number of old field systems within the site which have reverted to rush-dominated grassland. The species associated with this habitat include Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Jointed Rush, Compact Rush, Heath Bedstraw, Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*). There is generally a good cover of mosses, liverworts and lichens found in association with this habitat. Narrow strips of scrub/woodland can also be found on more steeply ground, dominated by Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula* spp.) and with occasional oak (*Quercus* spp.). The understorey comprises Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with some Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) in places.

Three species of Red Data Book vertebrates, protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976, have been recorded within the site. Otter is listed in Annex II of the Bern Convention and Annexes II and IV of the E.U. Habitats Directive, Irish Hare is a sub-species listed in Annex III of the Bern Convention and Common Frog is listed in Annex V of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The predominant land use around the site is afforestation. Grazing also occurs, and both sheep and cattle are present on lands which have not been planted. Fishing is reported to be carried out on Lough Nageage, which is noted to contain Trout. Peat cutting is active within the site but this is limited to the small pockets of blanket bog. Although old turf banks exist, it would appear that the only active cutting is carried out by Difco machine.

The biggest threat to the populations of White-clawed Crayfish is deterioration of water quality, particularly acidification and nutrient enrichment associated with the recent afforestation in the catchment. Run-off from agricultural practices is not thought to be a major threat due to the limited amount of improved pasture in the vicinity of the site.

This is an important site because of the population of White-clawed Crayfish that it supports. The range of habitats found at the site, along with the species of plants and animals supported, add to the value.