



Site Name: Newport River SAC

Site Code: 002144

The Newport River itself is relatively short, flowing from Beltra Lough to the sea at Newport, Co. Mayo. This site consists of the Newport River, Lough Beltra, and the tributaries the Skerdagh, Glenisland Crumpaun/Boghadoon and Bracklagh/Cloondaff.

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):

[1029] Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)

[1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)

This is generally a low-level river which flows through wet grassland and wet heath. In parts the wet grassland is improved to varying degrees through the application of fertilisers. A small section in the east of the site flows through blanket bog. There are sections of the river bank which are wooded with deciduous trees. Some coniferous afforestation occurs close to the river in two areas.

The interest of this site lies primarily in the presence of a significant population of Freshwater Pearl Mussel, a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive and also protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976. A survey in 1995 estimated the population within the site at approximately 5,000 individuals. The water quality of the river is good and the mussels were found throughout the river system in both gravel and rocky bed areas.

The Newport River is a renowned salmonid river and hosts Atlantic Salmon. The river gets a good run of spring salmon and many large fish are caught every year. This system has traditionally been regarded as an excellent spring salmon, grilse and sea trout fishery.

For a large proportion of the rivers course it flows through wet heath. This habitat is widespread throughout the east of the site where the peat is approximately 30-50 cm deep. Species present include Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*), Heath Rush (*J. squarrosus*), Soft Rush (*J. effusus*), sedges (*Carex* spp.), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), lichen species (e.g. *Cladonia portentosa* and *C. uncialis*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), with occasional Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), and oak (*Quercus* sp.). Bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.)

and liverworts are common. In the area adjacent to Derrynafreva Lough the rare Irish Heath (*Erica erigena*) is found in abundance. In parts of the site the heath community is dominated by Purple Moor-grass and Bog-myrtle.

Also found within the site is broadleaved deciduous woodland which comprises Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Hawthorn, Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willow (*Salix* spp.), Holly and Oak. In some places the woodland is rather open and is presumably grazed (indicated by the absence of ground flora). In other instances a more luxuriant growth of ground flora can be found. Typical species include Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Hard Fern and Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*). In addition these areas are rich in ferns, liverworts, lichens and mosses. More swampy carr is found close to the river's edge, and more typically along drainage channels and streams feeding into the river. These areas contain a higher percentage of willow and Alder, with occasional Oak. The ground flora in these areas is typically dominated by a tussocky Purple Moor-grass/Bog-myrtle community.

The other common habitat within the site is wet rushy grassland. These areas support Soft Rush, Hard Rush (*J. inflexus*), bent grasses (*Agrostis* spp.), Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), thistles (*Cirsium* spp.), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and a good cover of mosses.

Otter, Badger, Irish Hare and Common Frog, four Red Data Book species which are also protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976, occur in the site. The Common Lizard is also believed to be present. It is also protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976.

The Kingfisher, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, has been recorded along the Newport River. Red Grouse can be found on areas of wet heath within the site.

While water quality is considered good, there are potential threats to the river water quality through nutrient enrichment, particularly from agricultural intensification. Further afforestation within the catchment could also pose a threat to the water quality. The Freshwater Pearl Mussel is vulnerable to fishing.

The Newport River SAC is of considerable conservation value. It is an important site for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel and the Atlantic Salmon, species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The water quality of the river is good and the site supports populations of several protected species, including Otter and Kingfisher. The rare Irish Heath is also known from the site.