

Site Name: Towerhill House SAC

Site Code: 002179

Towerhill House is situated 10 km north of Ballinrobe in Co. Mayo. The site comprises the ruins of Towerhill House, the surrounding woodlands, Lough Beg and its associated swamp vegetation.

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):

[1303] Lesser Horseshoe Bat (<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>)

At this site the Lesser Horseshoe Bats use a man-made, stone underground passage which runs around the ruin of Towerhill House. This offers ideal winter hibernation conditions as it is humid and remains at a constant temperature. The entrance to the passage is extremely narrow and there is little or no disturbance by visitors.

Up to 56 bats have been recorded at Towerhill House in recent years, making it a site of international importance. It is also notable for being along the northern limit of the distribution of the species in Europe.

At the south of the site, a series of drains and a stream flow into Lough Beg, a small lake which is surrounded by swamp vegetation and wet woodland. The lake system is of some interest, with extensive reed beds (*Phragmites australis*) and fine stands of Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*). The wet woodland is mainly Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). The uncommon Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) occurs within the swamp vegetation. The remainder of the site is mainly composed of commercial coniferous forestry, though in places this is of mixed composition. The woodland and watercourses provide ideal foraging and shelter conditions for the bats, which are often active in hibernacula in autumn and spring.

The macro-invertebrate community of the wetland area is also interesting, containing elements characteristic of littoral lacustrine and slow flowing riverine habitats. There is also a high diversity of aquatic beetle species at this site.

At present there is little disturbance to the bats though the erection of a grille at the roost entrance would be useful. Any commercial felling of timber near the roost site would negatively impact on the bats.

Overall this site is of conservation importance due to the habitats and species it supports, and in particular the Annex II listed Lesser Horseshoe Bat.