

Site Name: Island Fen SAC

Site Code: 002236

Island Fen SAC is located in a small valley in the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, south west of Clareen village in Co. Offaly. The geology of the area is Lower Carboniferous Limestone and the principle soil is grey brown podzolic with brown earths, gleys, basin peat and limestone gravels and sands. The site overlies an old lake bed lined with shelly marl. Soil cover is generally thin, with some rocks protruding locally. This wetland site is relatively small, but is quite species-diverse.

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):

[5130] Juniper Scrub [7230] Alkaline Fens
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Excellent specimens of upright Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) occur at this site in association with species-rich calcareous grassland, heath and some exposed limestone rocks. The ground flora of the Juniper scrub is a calcareous grassland/heath mosaic, in which is found Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and many orchid species. Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) are also present.

The alkaline fen vegetation occurs on the reed margins to the west and in the north of the site. Typically, Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) dominates, with many moss species (including *Calliergonella cuspidatum* and *Ctenidium molluscum*) and a rich vascular plant flora including Purple Moor-grass, Carnation Sedge, Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Glaucous Sedge (*C. flacca*), Devil's-bit Scabious, Tormentil and Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*). Species such as Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) and Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) occur less frequently.

The fen grades into reedswamp and wet marsh/swamp habitat. A small area of coppiced Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) dominated woodland occurs to the north-east of the site. Also present are occasional Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and Yew. The shrub layer here is almost non-existent, and the ground flora appears relatively poor with occasional Sheep's Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*) and Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*).

Jays are present within the woodland. Other birds regularly seen at the site include Kestrel, Raven and Herons.

The Irish Hare occurs here. This is a sub-species and is listed under the Bern Convention. It is also legally protected in Ireland under the Wildlife Act, 1976, and is listed as internationally important in the Irish Red Data Book. The Common Frog also occurs in abundance within the site. This is also a Red Data Book species listed as internationally important, and is legally protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976. It is listed in Annex V of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Cattle grazing is the dominant land use at the site. Recent damage from drainage activities to the north of the site has reduced the overall scientific interest somewhat, but the remainder of the site does not appear to be under threat from similar activities.

This site is important for the occurrence of excellent examples of upright Juniper scrub formations, on a species rich calcareous grassland/heath, and alkaline fen, both habitats listed on Annex 1 of the E.U. Habitats Directive.