



**Site Name: Ballinduff Turlough SAC**

**Site Code: 002295**

Ballinduff Turlough is situated in a narrow basin in the limestone lowlands of south Co. Galway, 5 km north-east of Gort. It is part of the Coole Lough complex of lakes and turloughs, most of which are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). There are rock outcrops around the northern half and glacial drift in the south. There is a low hill to the south outside the site. The boundary in the south-west is the Galway-Limerick railway line.

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):

[3180] Turloughs*
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The turlough is late-draining and a pool persists into June or July and re-floods easily. There is a marshy hollow in the middle of the southern section which receives an inflow of water from the south. The hydrology of the site is probably controlled by a complex of swallow holes and subsidence near Coolfin. During floods the turlough drains overland towards Coole Lough.

The main habitats on the site are various types of turlough grassland and turlough scrub which are related to the flooding regime. The turlough grassland types vary. In the wettest parts plant species such as Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Amphibious Bistort (*Polygonum amphibium*) and Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) occur with some Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris* subsp. *lacustris*). Higher up Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*) occur on marly rises, while the common community includes Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Creeping Cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*) and Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*). There is also a wide band of nutrient-poor grassland with Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia careulea*), Common Sedge, Long-stalked Yellow-sedge and Tawny Sedge (*C. hostiana*).

An unusual feature of the vegetation at this turlough is that Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) is very widespread and prominent throughout the turlough and is present in all of the above plant communities.

Low dense woodland which is liable to flood is the other main habitat on the site, mostly along the north-western edge of the basin. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) are the main constituents,

with other shrubs such as Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*) and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). The vicinity of the swallow-holes has a good woodland edge with tall herbs such as Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*), Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*) and a large colony of Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*).

Other habitats include scrub not subject to flooding and the inflowing drain from the south-east which contains abundant water-cress (*Nasturtium* sp.), around which wet grassland with Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) occurs. The rest of the site is mainly improved grassland, which is included for water quality protection reasons.

In winter, Whooper Swans and Bewick's Swans have been recorded at the site. These feed mainly on improved pasture on Corker Hill to the south, but roost on the open water of the turlough. They are considered to be part of the large swan population that is centred at Coole Lough. In winters 1996/97 and 1997/98, between 200 and 300 Whooper Swans were recorded, and 10-50 Bewick's Swans. Lower numbers of Whooper Swans occurred in subsequent winters and Bewick's Swans are now rarely recorded in south Galway (a trend reflected throughout Ireland). Both of these swan species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, and the numbers of Whooper Swans recorded in the above years were of international importance. Numbers of other waterbirds using the site in winter are low.

The rare invertebrate *Eurycercus glacialis* (Order Cladocera), which was first found in Ireland in 1985, occurs at Ballinduff Turlough. In Ireland, the species is seen to be a turlough specialist of the east Galway region, and it is rare elsewhere in Atlantic Europe. Its presence at the site adds to the ecological interest.

Grazing intensity on the turlough grassland is very low. Some clearance of dry scrub has taken place recently.

Ballinduff Turlough offers a wide range of turlough habitats with plant communities well-developed and with little grazing. The widespread presence of Shoreweed within different plant communities is an unusual turlough feature. The development of Buckthorn woodland and the swallow-hole vegetation are other unusual features. The presence of a rare turlough invertebrate adds to the ecological interest.