



**Site Name: Ballymore Fen SAC**

**Site Code: 002313**

Ballymore Fen lies approximately 17 km west of Mullingar adjacent to the Mullingar to Ballymore road (R390) in Co. Westmeath. The geology of the area is Carboniferous Limestone. The site occupies a relatively wide and deep depression in the surrounding drift which is fed on both the east and west by springs. The area may at one stage have been a lake of some size but at present is occupied by a transition mire complex with a characteristic lagg fen at the edges.

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):

[7140] Transition Mires
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In the wetter areas towards the centre and south of this site the vegetation is characterised by a scraw (i.e. floating vegetation) typified by patches with an abundance of Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*). Other associated plants include Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and sedges (*Carex* spp.). In slightly drier areas and on old banks are willow (*Salix* sp.) saplings, with occasional Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and ferns such as Regal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*). Where there is flowing water Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*) occurs.

At the edge of the wetter area, particularly at the east of the site, a gradation to Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) dominated fen occurs. Willow saplings with some Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and bog moss hummocks (*Sphagnum* spp.) are found throughout. Between the hummocks, abundant Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*), a Red Data Book species, occurs with species typically found in such conditions. The bryophyte communities are of considerable interest.

On the slopes surrounding the fen is a mosaic of improved, semi-improved and species-rich calcareous grasslands lightly grazed by cattle. Plant species present on the slopes at the east include Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Quaking-grass (*Brizia media*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and Cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*).

Associated with drains and flowing streams throughout the site are the 10-spined Stickleback, along with the Common Frog and Smooth Newt. Five species of dragonfly and damselfly were recorded on the wing: Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*), Common Hawker (*Aeshna juncea*), Keeled Skimmer (*Orthethrum coerulescens*), Azure damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*) and Variable damselfly (*Coenagrion pulchellum*).

Parts of the site have been cut for turf in the past, as evidenced by parallel heather covered ridges and banks. Peat cutting has not occurred for a long time – confirmed by a local landowner. Regeneration of vegetation is occurring in these areas and the ground underfoot is very wet and soft.

Ballymore Fen is interesting due to the overall variety of habitats and species in a relatively small area, and also due to the richness of the transition mire/scraw which is enhanced by the presence of the Red Data Book species Round-leaved Wintergreen.