

Site Name: Ratty River Cave SAC

Site Code: 002316

This site lies approximately 2.5 km north of Sixmilebridge in Co. Clare. It consists of a cave, and also an important winter roost and a breeding site of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

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):

[8310] Caves [1303] Lesser Horseshoe Bat (<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>)

The cave in Ratty River Cave SAC is a natural fossil limestone cave set into the east-facing bank of Ratty River (also known as Owenogarney River). The cave entrance is overgrown with Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). Inside the entrance there is a low crawl, but the cave opens into a main chamber before diverging into two tunnels. This cave has not been documented, but habitats present include rock roof and walls, and stalactites. The floor features are particularly notable because of their pristine condition. The cave is not known to flood.

Lesser Horseshoe Bats have been using the cave beside the Ratty River as a hibernation site for some years. During the winter of 2001, 187 bats were recorded here making it a site of international importance. A stretch of river and the bankside vegetation are included in the site as these are used by commuting bats. A derelict cottage which is situated nearby is also included as it contains a maternity roost of Lesser Horseshoe Bats. A total of 65 bats were recorded here in July 1998. The foraging areas used by these bats have yet to be established.

Neither roost is subject to disturbance and there are no other known threats to this site at present.