

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYALLIA LOUGH SPA

SITE CODE: 004041

Ballyallia Lough is a relatively small lake located on the River Fergus, a little north of Ennis town, Co. Clare. It is a shallow system but can rise substantially during winter floods. Habitat and species diversity around the lake is fairly low and only a few emergent plants are found, such as Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). A low-lying flood plain of wet grassland and rough pasture grazing land to the west is included within the site. The lake is used for a range of recreational activities.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Coot and Black-tailed Godwit. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The site supports a good diversity of wintering waterfowl, including swans, dabbling duck, diving duck and some waders. Seven of the species have populations of national importance (all figures given are mean peaks for the 4 winters 1995/96-1998/99): Wigeon (1,469), Gadwall (68), Mallard (502), Teal (863), Shoveler (288), Coot (331) and Black-tailed Godwit (278). The Shoveler population is the largest in the country (9.6% of the All-Ireland total), while that of Gadwall is also very notable (10.3% of the All-Ireland total). Other species which occur include Little Grebe (37), Whooper Swan (65), Pintail (18), Pochard (33), Tufted Duck (153), Lapwing (930), Mute Swan (28), Grey Heron (11), Cormorant (13), Greylag Goose (9) and Black-headed Gull (443).

The quality of the habitat for the birds is good and the site provides both feeding and roost sites for them. Some of the birds, especially Black-tailed Godwit, commute to the nearby River Fergus-River Shannon estuary.

Ballyallia Lough SPA is of considerable conservation significance for wintering waterfowl, having seven species with populations of national importance, those of Shoveler and Gadwall being of especial note. Also of note is the occurrence of Whooper Swan, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Ballyallia Lough is a Ramsar Convention site and a Wildfowl Sanctuary.