

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH CORRIB SPA

SITE CODE: 004042

Lough Corrib is the largest lake in the country and is located, for the most part, in County Galway, with a small section in the north extending into County Mayo. The lake can be divided into two parts: a relatively shallow basin in the south, which is underlain by Carboniferous limestone, and a larger, deeper basin to the north, which is underlain by more acidic granite, schists, shales and sandstones. The main inflowing rivers are the Black, Clare, Dooghta, Cregg, Owenriff and the channel from Lough Mask. The main outflowing river is the Corrib, which reaches the sea at Galway City.

The shallow, lime-rich waters of the southern basin of the lake support one of the most extensive beds of Stoneworts (Charophytes) in Ireland. These *Chara* beds are a very important source of food for waterfowl. In contrast, the northern basin contains more oligotrophic and acidic waters. Large areas of reedswamp vegetation, dominated by varying mixtures of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) occur around the margins of the lake. The lake has numerous islands, which range from relatively bare rocky islets to larger islands with grassland or woodland.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Greenland White-fronted Goose, Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Hen Harrier, Coot, Golden Plover, Black-Headed Gull, Common Gull, Common Tern and Arctic Tern. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. 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 Wetlands & Waterbirds.

Lough Corrib is an internationally important site that regularly supports in excess of 20,000 wintering waterbirds including an internationally important population of wintering Pochard (10,107) – except where indicated all figures are five year mean peaks for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000. The site also supports nationally important populations of wintering Greenland White-fronted Goose (160 - five year mean peak for the period 1994/95 to 1998/99), Gadwall (48), Shoveler (90), Tufted Duck (5,486), Coot (14,426) and Golden Plover (1,727). Other species which occur include Mute Swan (182), Whooper Swan (35), Wigeon (528), Teal (74), Mallard (155), Goldeneye (74), Lapwing (2,424) and Curlew (114).

In winter nationally important numbers of Hen Harrier (8 - four year mean peak count between 2006 and 2009) also utilise the site as a communal roost.

Lough Corrib is also a traditional breeding site for gulls and terns, with various islands being used for nesting each year. There are important colonies of Common Tern (37 pairs in 1995) and Arctic Tern (60 pairs in 1995). The site supports substantial colonies of Black-headed Gull (431 pairs in 2000) and Common Gull (186 pairs in 2000), these representing 3% and 11% of the respective all-Ireland totals. Small numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull have also been recorded breeding within the site.

The site supports approximately half of the national population of nesting Common Scoter (30 pairs in 1995); Lough Corrib was colonised by this rare, Red Data Book species only as recently as the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Lough Corrib SPA is an internationally important site which supports in excess of 20,000 wintering waterbirds, including a population of Pochard that is, itself, of international importance. A further six species of wintering waterfowl have populations of national importance. The site also contains a nationally important communal roost site for Hen Harrier. Lough Corrib is the most important site in the country for breeding Common Scoter. Its populations of breeding gulls and terns are also notable, with nationally important numbers of Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Common Tern and Arctic Tern occurring. It is of note that several species which regularly occur are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Hen Harrier, Golden Plover, Common Tern and Arctic Tern. Lough Corrib is a Ramsar Convention site.

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