

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH IRON SPA

SITE CODE: 004046

Lough Iron is a small- to moderately-sized midland lake, located some 12 km north-west of Mullingar. It is situated on the Inny River, which flows from Lough Derravaragh approximately 5 km to the north-east. Lough Owel occurs a few kilometres to the south-east and is connected to Lough Iron by a small stream. The underlying geology is limestone and the lake is mesotrophic in character.

The dominant wetland plant species along the margins of the lake are Canary Reed-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), the latter species forming large expanses of wet grassland.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Coot and Golden Plover. 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.

Lough Iron is of international importance as a site for wintering waterfowl. It is a traditional haunt for the internationally important Midland lakes Greenland White-fronted Goose flock (426 - five year mean peak between 1994/95 and 1998/99). The site also supports an internationally important population of Whooper Swan (214) and nationally important numbers of Wigeon (1,229), Teal (759), Shoveler (164), Coot (293) and Golden Plover (2,200) - all figures are five year mean peaks for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000).

Lough Iron SPA is of high ornithological importance, primarily for supporting internationally important populations of Whooper Swan and Greenland White-fronted Goose. The site also holds a notable diversity of other waterfowl, including dabbling duck, diving duck and waders. It is of note that three of the species which regularly occur, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Whooper Swan and Golden Plover, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Lough Iron is a Ramsar Convention site and a Wildfowl Sanctuary.