

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH GARA SPA

SITE CODE: 004048

Lough Gara is located on the Co. Sligo/Roscommon border south-west of the Curlew Mountains and between the towns of Boyle and Ballaghaderreen. Most of the lake is in Co. Sligo, but two sections in the south and north-east lie within Co. Roscommon. It is a shallow (maximum depth 16 m), medium-sized lake, which overlies Carboniferous limestones and shales, and Devonian sandstone. The main inflowing river is the River Lung while the main outflow is the Boyle River. There are two main sections to the lake, a larger northern basin and a smaller southern basin, joined by a narrow channel. The shoreline is convoluted and has receded substantially from its original level due to various drainage schemes since the mid-19th century. The site includes several low-lying islands.

The shallow lake margins support extensive reed swamps dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), with occasional Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). In the southernmost part of the lake, clumps of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) are particularly abundant.

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

Lough Gara is used regularly by an internationally important population of Greenland White-fronted Goose (mean peak of 510 individuals over the five winters 1995/96 to 1999/2000). An internationally important population of Whooper Swan also uses the site (mean peak of 321 for the 5 year period 1994/95 to 1998/99), with high numbers present in the winter of 1996/97 (peak of 654). A range of other species occurs, including Great Crested Grebe (16), Mute Swan (38), Wigeon (593), Teal (44), Mallard (157), Shoveler (18), Pochard (41), Tufted Duck (49), Goldeneye (20), Golden Plover (270), Lapwing (75) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (172) - all figures are mean peaks for the two winters 1995/96 to 1996/97.

Lough Gara SPA is of high ornithological importance principally on account of the internationally important populations of Greenland White-fronted Goose and Whooper Swan that are associated with the lake. The occurrence of these species, along with Golden Plover, is of particular note as they are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Lough Gara is a Ramsar Convention site and a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

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