

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: LOUGH CARRA SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004051**

Lough Carra, which extends for over 9 km along its long axis, lies to the north-east of Lough Mask, in the Corrib catchment in Co. Mayo. It is one of the best examples in Ireland of a hard water marl lake. It is a shallow (mean depth 1.5 m, maximum depth 18 m), predominantly spring-fed lake with only a few inflowing streams. It is connected to Lough Mask via the Keel River. The water has an alkaline pH and negligible amounts of iron and manganese. Sodium and chloride are present in relatively high concentrations. Lough Carra is classified as a mesotrophic system.

Lough Carra has well-developed stonewort communities in the submerged zones, and includes such species as *Chara curta*, *C. desmacantha*, *C. rudis* and *C. contraria*. The lake has a highly indented shoreline (over 69 km in length) and includes many small islands. It is fringed by a diverse complex of limestone and wetland habitats. The wetland habitats include both Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) fen and alkaline fen. In addition to the fen habitats, there are widespread reed swamps, wet grassland and some freshwater marsh communities around the lakeshores.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Common Gull.

The islands in Lough Carra have traditionally supported nesting gulls. A survey in 1993 recorded Common Gull (72 individuals) and Black-headed Gull (252 individuals). The site was surveyed in 1999 as part of the Seabird 2000 Survey and 65 pairs of Common Gull and 100 pairs of Black-headed Gull were recorded.

The site also supports wintering populations of a number of species including Wigeon (67), Gadwall (26), Teal (63), Mallard (140), Shoveler (38), Pochard (33), Tufted Duck (133), Goldeneye (64), Little Grebe (14) Great Crested Grebe (12) and Lapwing (243) - all figures are mean peaks for 4 of the 5 winters in the period 1995/96-1999/2000. In the past, Lough Carra supported a population of Mallard of national importance.

Lough Carra SPA is of considerable ornithological importance for breeding gulls including a nationally important population of Common Gull. Part of Lough Carra SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

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