SITE NAME: LOUGH CUTRA SPA

SITE CODE: 004056

Lough Cutra is a large oligo/mesotrophic freshwater lake lying on limestone but with much sediment washed down from the sandstone hills above. This lake is situated about 4 km south-east of Gort, Co. Galway. The Owendalulleegh River is the main in-flowing river. The shoreline is often stony or sandy, though in places it is peat-fringed. Marginal wetland vegetation includes well-developed beds of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) in sheltered bays, as well as localised patches of swamp and fen vegetation with species such as Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and a range of associated sedges (*Carex* spp.) and fen mosses. Woodland occurs around much of the lakeshore. While much of this is planted, wet woodland with willows (*Salix* spp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) is also represented. The lake has a number of islands, some of which are wooded.

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

Lough Cutra is a long-established breeding site for Cormorant (166 pairs in 1985) although numbers have declined in recent years (34 pairs in 1996). The birds breed on Parsons Island and appear to commute to the coast for feeding.

The lake also supports wintering waterfowl, including Whooper Swan (9), Mallard (95), Tufted Duck (48) and Goldeneye (31) – all counts are mean peak counts for the three winters 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1998/99. Some of the birds, and especially the Goldeneye, also use nearby Ballynakill Lough. Greenland White-fronted Goose used the lake in the past but there are no records in recent years. Several pairs of Mute Swan breed, as does Common Sandpiper.

Lough Cutra SPA is of particular importance for its long-established Cormorant breeding colony. The regular occurrence of Whooper Swan, albeit in low numbers, is of note as this species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

24.3.2009