

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH FERN SPA

SITE CODE: 004060

Lough Fern is a relatively small lake with a maximum length of 2.5 km. The lake lies on the Leannan River in Co. Donegal and is underlain by metamorphic rocks (schist, gneiss and quartzite). It is a shallow system, with a maximum depth of 2.5 m. The water is soft though it is not markedly coloured; the lake is classified as mesotrophic. The shoreline is often stony though swamp vegetation is found both in the northern and southern parts. The stony shores have Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpiodes*). The swamp vegetation is mainly comprised of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Canary Reed-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). The protected, Red Data Book plant species Globeflower (*Trollius europaeus*) occurs on shores within the site. There are two small islands in the lake, both of which are covered with deciduous woodland.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for Pochard. 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 Fern is of ornithological importance for wintering waterfowl and particularly diving duck. Whilst bird counts at the site extend back to the 1970s, these have been irregular and there have been few in recent years. Nationally important numbers of Pochard have been recorded at the site (604, two year mean peak, 1995/96 and 1998/99). Other species present include Tufted Duck (181), Goldeneye (27) and Whooper Swan (18), as well as small numbers of dabbling ducks such as Wigeon and Mallard. Little Grebe and Water Rail also use the site. It appears that numbers of the main species fluctuate widely, suggesting that the lake may be an important temporary refuge when birds are displaced from other sites.

Lough Fern is of ornithological importance as it supports a nationally important population of Pochard. The occurrence of Whooper Swan, albeit in small numbers, is of note as this species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of Lough Fern SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

8.7.2014