

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH MASK SPA

SITE CODE: 004062

Lough Mask, at over 8,000 ha, is the sixth largest lake in the country. It is located in south Co. Mayo with a small area extending across the border into Co. Galway. It extends for over 14 km along its long axis and is on average about 5 km in width. The underlying geology is of Carboniferous limestones, with some shales and sandstones. The main inflowing rivers are the Cloon and Robe, and the stream from Lough Carra to the north-east. The main outflow is to Lough Corrib to the south. The eastern part of the lake is edged by a low-lying shoreline which is subject to winter flooding but is considerably deeper on the western side where there is a long narrow trench with a maximum depth of 58 m. The water of the lake is moderately hard. Islands are a feature of the lake, especially in the south-east sector.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Greenland White-fronted Goose, Tufted Duck, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Common Tern. 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 Mask is one of the most important sites in the country for breeding gulls and a survey in 1999 recorded Black-headed Gull (329 pairs), Common Gull (124 pairs) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (286). Whilst higher numbers of nesting gulls have been recorded in the recent past, the 1999 populations of the three species still accounted for 2.4%, 7.8% and 6% of the respective national totals. The lake is also a traditional breeding site for Common Tern, with 44 pairs in 1995 and 39 pairs in 1999.

In winter the site has a range of waterfowl, especially diving duck, with the Tufted Duck population (453) being of national importance - all figures are mean peaks for 4 of the 5 winters in the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000. It also supports Whooper Swan (54) and is visited at times by part of the Erriff/Derrycraff population of Greenland White-fronted Goose (peak count of 62 in 1995/96). Other species using the site include Mute Swan (49), Whooper Swan (54), Wigeon (84), Teal (99), Mallard (101), Pochard (65), Goldeneye (89), Red-breasted Merganser (12), Little Grebe (17), Cormorant (36), Coot (112) Lapwing (31) and Curlew (75).

Lough Mask is one of the most important inland gull breeding sites in the country, with nationally important populations of three gull species. It also has a nationally important colony of Common Tern. The site supports a good diversity of wintering waterfowl, including a nationally important population of Tufted Duck. The site is also regularly utilised by a proportion of the Erriff/Derrycraff population of Greenland White-fronted Goose. The occurrence of three species, Whooper Swan,

Greenland White-fronted Goose and Common Tern, is of note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of Lough Mask SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

8.7.2014