

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: TACUMSHIN LAKE SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004092**

Tacumshin Lake is a shallow coastal lagoon situated on the south Co. Wexford coast. The lagoon was formerly a shallow sea bay which, due to longshore drift, has become separated from the sea by a gravel/sand spit that extends across the mouth of the bay from east to west. At times in the past the lagoon was completely land-locked by the spit and at the end of the 19th century, when this situation prevailed for some time, the lake was drained by means of a large bore pipe set through the gravel/sand bar. In the mid-1970s the spit again closed off the lagoon from the sea. To relieve subsequent flooding of surrounding farmland, the old drainage pipe was reactivated and a second pipe installed at a lower level. The capacity of these two pipes is insufficient to prevent the lagoon filling up in winter when inflow from streams is greater than the outflow through the pipes. To speed the drainage from the lagoon two main drains leading to the landward end of the pipes were excavated.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Little Grebe, Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Coot, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing and Black-Tailed Godwit. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. 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.

The waterfowl population of the lagoon is exceptionally diverse and the area supports large numbers of birds throughout the year, which is unusual among Irish wetlands. In winter, Tacumshin Lake supports internationally important populations of Whooper Swan (213) and Black-tailed Godwit (538) - all figures are mean peaks for the five year period 1995/96 to 1999/2000. A further twelve species occur in numbers of national importance, i.e. Little Grebe (71), Bewick's Swan (235), Wigeon (4,725), Gadwall (119), Teal (975), Pintail (322), Shoveler (107), Tufted Duck (420), Coot (1,669), Golden Plover (3,932), Grey Plover (85) and Lapwing (5,302). Of particular note is that the Pintail and Gadwall populations represent over 19% and 18% of the respective national totals. Other species using the site in winter include Greenland White-fronted Goose (41), Dunlin (374), Curlew (391), Pale-bellied Brent Goose (115), Shelduck (61), Pochard (314), Mallard (196), Redshank (74), Greenshank (6), Black-headed Gull (157) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (146). The site provides both feeding and roosting habitat for the various species.

Hen Harrier roost within the site in winter. Marsh Harrier is a regular visitor in summer and nesting by this very scarce bird of prey is a possibility. Tacumshin is one of the few sites in Ireland where Garganey occurs regularly, and nesting probably occurs in most years. The swamp vegetation supports a good breeding population of

the localised Reed Warbler (c. 10 pairs), whilst Sedge Warbler is a common breeding bird.

Tacumshin is an important site for passage waders, including Ruff (12), Little Stint (200) and Curlew Sandpiper (10) – all figures are peak counts in the period 1995/96 to 2004/05. The lagoon is particularly attractive to vagrant North American and Eurasian waterfowl and such species as Pectoral Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Green Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper are regularly recorded in low numbers (1-5) at the site. In autumn the abundant insect life of the dry lake bed provides food for large numbers of migrating Swallows and Martins which also use the reed beds as a night roosting area, with up to 10,000 individuals being recorded in recent years. Large numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull (up to 1,000) gather at the lagoon for some weeks prior to their autumn migration southwards and some linger into the early winter period.

Tacumshin Lake SPA is one of the most important ornithological sites in the country. The occurrence of internationally important populations of Whooper Swan and Black-tailed Godwit is of especial note, as is the presence of nationally important populations of an additional 12 wintering waterfowl species. It is one of the top sites in the country for Pintail and Gadwall. It is also of importance for its summer visitors, including such rare and localised species as Marsh Harrier, Garganey and Reed Warbler. The site is also notable for a range of passage waders. Also of note is that a number of the species that occur regularly are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Whooper Swan, Bewick's Swan, Golden Plover, Ruff, Hen Harrier and Marsh Harrier. Greenland White-fronted Goose which uses the site on occasions is also listed on Annex I of this directive. Part of Tacumshin Lake SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.