

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: DURNESH LOUGH SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004145**

Durnesh Lough is situated to the east of Rossnowlagh on the southern side of Donegal Bay, c. 10 km north of Ballyshannon in Co. Donegal. It is a large sedimentary lagoon which is separated from the sea by a barrier composed partly of drumlins and partly of high sand dunes, with the remains of a cobble barrier occurring in places. The lagoon formerly had a natural outlet to the sea but the outlet is now an artificial channel and pipe running under the sand dunes which appears to allow a certain amount of seawater to enter. The underlying geology of the area is limestone but this is covered by a thick layer of clay drift deposits in the form of drumlins.

Extensive reedbeds occur beside the lough. These are dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) and Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*). Areas dominated by Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) are also present here. Large areas of wet grassland occur adjacent to the lagoon.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Whooper Swan and Greenland White-fronted Goose.

Durnesh Lough is an important wintering and staging area for Whooper Swan with nationally important numbers utilising the site (140 - 5 year mean peak for the 5 seasons 1995/96-1999/2000). Internationally important numbers of Whooper Swan have been recorded at the site - 400 in 1966, 250 in 1969, 223 in 1972 and 323 in 1979. The site is also a regular feeding site for a flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose (97 - 5 year mean peak for the 5 seasons 1994/95-1998/99). While the Greenland White-fronted Goose flocks have declined at many sites during the last decade, the numbers utilising Durnesh Lough have remained relatively constant (86 - 4 year mean peak for 4 of the years between 2003/04 and 2008/09). Other species utilising the site include Wigeon (56), Teal (19), Pochard (97), Tufted Duck (43), Goldeneye (42), Scaup (18) and Coot (15) - all figures are mean peaks for 4 of the 5 winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000.

Durnesh Lough SPA is an important site for wintering waterfowl and is utilised by a nationally important population of Whooper Swan. The site is also an important feeding location for a Greenland White-fronted Goose flock. Both Whooper Swan and Greenland White-fronted Goose are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.