

**An Foras
Forbartha
Teoranta**

**The National
Institute
for Physical
Planning and
Construction
Research**

CONSERVATION AND AMENITY
ADVISORY SERVICE



Revised List of
Areas of Scientific Interest
in County Offaly

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OFFALY

Introduction

In the report Areas of Scientific Interest in Ireland published by An Foras Forbartha in 1981, thirty-five sites of Scientific Importance are described for County Offaly. This report was a revision of the County Reports on Areas of Scientific Interest which had been compiled by An Foras during the nineteen seventies. The 1979 Offaly County Development Plan shows thirty-four sites of Scientific Importance on Map 4 and these differ slightly from the list for County Offaly published by An Foras in 1981. Four sites which have been included on the map in the County Development Plan are no longer considered as sites of Scientific Importance. These are:

Bog north of Shannonbridge
Leap Castle
Limestone Quarry near Cloneen
Knockydown Wood

and they have been omitted because further work in the County has revealed other sites exhibiting their Scientific Features of Interest in a much better manner. Five extra sites are included in the Foras list which are not shown on the map in the County Development Plan. These are:

Mongan's Bog
Roscrea Bog
Kiltober Esker and Woodland
Camcor Woodland
Lough Boora

These are included in the site descriptions given overleaf and are marked with an asterisk.

The lists of sites of Scientific Importance are constantly being updated and revised by An Foras Forbartha. Since publication of Sites of Scientific Interest in Ireland in July 1981 five further sites of Scientific Importance have been identified for County Offaly. These are listed and described on page 7.

Name of Area	Habitat	Interest	Description
<u>OFFALY</u>			
<u>International Importance</u>			
1. Little Brosna River M 98 11 600 ha (also in Tipperary N., Galway)	Grassland Marsh	Ecological (O)	The river flood-plain and its associated marshes form an outstanding area for wintering wildfowl and waders. Numbers fluctuate with the degree of flooding on the callows and shooting pressures but include wigeon (14,000), teal (2,200), white-fronted goose (200) and black-tailed godwit (4,000), all numbers of international importance. Large flocks of pintail (250), shoveler (540), lapwing (15,000) and golden plover (3,000) also occur at times.
2. Raheenmore N 44 32 200 ha	Raised bog	Ecological	One of the best examples of a raised bog in a basin situation. Some of the marginal slope is still intact and the site has a well-developed flora and fauna. About 50 ha of the bog are actively growing with a hummock and hollow topography. The flora is relatively rich and has been augmented with the rush, <u>Scheuchzeria palustris</u> , which was transplanted from Pollagh Bog in 1959, before its exploitation. The plant has not been seen recently, however.
3. * Rahugh Ridge (Kiltober esker) N 38 32 20 ha (also in Westmeath)	Woodland (d)	Ecological	The esker supports probably the most natural woodland in the country on such a site. Though formerly cleared, hazel, ash and oak now form a complete and well-grown canopy. There is also an interesting ground flora.
<u>National Importance</u>			
4. Charleville Wood N 32 23 170 ha	Woodland (d)	Ecological	Large woods, predominantly of oak, with ash, elm, birch and an understorey of hazel and hawthorn. Some parts, particularly the island in the lake, have not been interfered with for 150 years, are therefore ecologically interesting. The lake itself (20 ha) is important locally for wintering wildfowl (200).
5. Croghan Hill N 48 33 200 ha	-	Geological	An extinct volcano composed of tuffs and basaltic lava flows, interbedded with Carboniferous limestone.
6. Shannon River Athlone - Banagher 800 ha N 98 23	Grassland	Ecological (O)	A wintering site and migration route of major importance to birds. The wildfowl population includes wigeon (1,000), mallard (600), teal (600), wild swan (300), and white-fronted goose (100). The geese regularly roost on Mongan's Bog, a well-developed raised bog near Clonmacnoise. The bog is a discrete unit bordered by an esker - the Pilgrim's Road - on the north side. It is very wet and regenerating well.
* a) Mongan's Bog N 03 30 100 ha (also in Galway, Roscommon, Westmeath)	Raised bog		

Name of Area	Habitat	Interest	Description
<u>OFFALY</u>			
<u>Regional Importance</u>			
7.	Annaghmore Lough N 30 15 320 ha (also in Laois)	Lake Marsh Ecological	Partially drained lake with a flora which is part calcicole and part calcifuge. The marginal areas show various stages of succession from open water to dry land. There is also a small birch wood and an extensive raised bog nearby. Important local feeding habitat for waders and other birds.
8.	Ballyduff esker N 28 27 34 ha	Woodland (d) Ecological	Good example of an esker ridge with educational potential. The plant associations on Trumpet Hill are of importance and include hazel scrub.
9.	Cloghan Demesne M 97 12 200 ha	Woodland (d) Ecological	The site consists of mixed deciduous woodland, raised bog and aquatic communities and is extremely diverse.
10.	Clonad Wood N 32 19 152 ha	Woodland (d) Grassland Ecological	A semi-natural oak woodland and with some planted beech and conifers. There is a rich fungus flora, and a varied ground flora. Nearby damp meadows contain some interesting plant species in another habitat type.
11.	Clorhane M 99 28 146 ha	Exposed rock Grassland Fen Geomorphological: Ecological (B)	This is the most extensive area of limestone pavement in the county and one of relatively few east of the Shannon. It is colonised largely by hazel scrub but open areas of rock and grassland still exist. The grassland is very species-rich. The southern part of the area is a peatland with a variation from acid to alkaline peat of some ecological interest. The saw sedge, <u>Cladium</u> , is found growing in shallow peat.
12.	Fin Lough N 03 29 100 ha	Lake Ecological	A lake which lies between an esker ridge and raised bog and so has a diversity of aquatic and semi-aquatic habitats. Wintering wildfowl include teal (80) and whooper swans.
13.	Kilcormac esker N 26 21 70 ha	Grassland Geomorphological Ecological	Part of a well-developed esker ridge with a variety of habitats from calcareous grassland to woodland of hazel and sometimes beech.
14.	Lough Coura N 09 13 156 ha	Fen Ecological (B)	A dry fen, the development of which has been well-documented from the time it was a swamp. Characteristic plants include the sedges, <u>Carex dioica</u> and <u>C. limosa</u> and the orchid, <u>Dactylorhiza traunsteineri</u> .
15.	Lough Nanag esker N 00 28 34 ha	Grassland Ecological (B)	Calcareous grassland is particularly well-developed on the eskers west of the lake and is notable for the occurrence of the orchid, <u>Neotinea</u> . The lake itself is completely surrounded by peatland and there is an interesting transition from it to the glacial drift.
16.	Mount Saint Joseph woods S 08 90 38 ha	Woodland (d) Ecological	Mature deciduous woodlands mainly of oak, occur on esker ridges along the Little Brosna River. They have an interesting species composition, especially in the ground flora.

Name of Area	Habitat	Interest	Description	
<u>OFFALY</u>				
<u>Regional Importance</u>				
17.	Pallas Lough N 27 19 70 ha	Lake	Ecological (B)	Limestone lake stocked with brown and rainbow trout. Marginal marsh and grassland with a rich flora. One of few areas of open water in the county, used by up to 190 duck (mainly teal) in winter.
18.	*Roscrea Bog S 16 90 27 ha	Fen	Ecological	Calcareous marsh surrounded by meadowland providing a diversity of habitats. Two rare molluscs, <u>Vertigo geyeri</u> and <u>Agriolimax laevis</u> , and many other species have been recorded.
19.	Slieve Bloom N 25 02 1750 ha	Blanket bog	Ecological	Extensive blanket bog is found above 390 m and it has a characteristic flora and fauna. The best area is on the plateau above the Camcor River.
20.	Woodville N 07 07 105 ha	Woodland (d)	Ecological	Dense hazel and oak woodland with some conifer plantations. A drying-up lake with reeds and semi-aquatic vegetation is included. It supports some wildfowl and large numbers of snipe. Diverse ecology in different tree communities. Mature mixed woodland of oak and beech occurs at Knockydown and offers a valuable contrast.
21.	Woodfield Bog N 25 36 200 ha	Raised bog	Ecological	A small area of raised bog with several different plant communities. The flora includes the clubmoss, <u>Lepidotis</u> .
<u>Local Importance</u>				
22.	Ballintemple S 01 84 40 ha	Raised bog	Ecological (B)	An area of cutover bog recolonised by some interesting plant communities.
23.	Ballycumber Bog N 16 29 160 ha	Raised bog	Ecological	A large raised bog, extensively cut on the south-east side. Plant species include carnation sedge, <u>Carex panicea</u> , a species characteristic of more western regions.
24.	*Camcor wood N 22 04 10 ha	Woodland (d)	Ecological	A well-developed alder wood occurs at this point in the Camcor valley above Kinnitty. Though small in extent, the community is characteristic and fairly rich in species.
25.	Clonfinlough esker N 06 29 82 ha	Grassland	Ecological	Species-rich turf on an esker, with some uncommon plants. The variety of habitats along the whole esker is of value for education.
26.	The Derries N 10 06 20 ha	Raised bog	Ecological	A wet raised bog to the north-east of Birr with some scattered Scot's pine and pockets of birch scrub. The area is surrounded by conifer plantations but retains much of educational value.

Name of Area	Habitat	Interest	Description
<u>OFFALY</u>			
<u>Local Importance</u>			
27. Derrykeel meadows N 16 04 20 ha	Fen	Ecological	Wet calcareous meadows on the site of a cut-over bog have an interesting flora with the rush, <u>Juncus subnodulosus</u> .
28. Esker Bridge N 55 27 15 ha	Grassland	Ecological Geomorphological	A well-developed flora occurs here on eskers that have been partly modified by excavation and agriculture.
29. Golden Grove S 12 92 21 ha	Woodland (d)	Ecological	A planted beechwood with belts of firs, bordered by more natural woodland of alder, oak and ash. Several large, old trees and some fallen timber add to the ecological value.
30. Grand Canal N 525 313 to N 579 326 5 km section	River	Ecological	Open water and banks of the canal provide a refuge for local aquatic flora and fauna. On this stretch the canal passes through pastureland and raised bog.
31. Knockbarron Wood N 18 07 32 ha	Woodland (d)	Ecological	A planted deciduous woodland of sycamore with patches of hazel, ash and other species. Sycamore is not often used in pure stand and the area has ecological interest for this reason. Associated fauna is relatively plentiful.
32. * Lough Boora N 16 18 6 ha	-	Geological	Site of an early Post-glacial lakeshore which has been exposed by the drainage and excavation associated with turf-cutting.
33. Lough Roe Bog N 25 30 665 ha	Raised bog	Ecological	A very good example of a wet raised bog, still in active growth.
34. Raheen Lough N 46 18 25 ha	Lake	Ecological (O)	A fairly shallow lake with a stony bottom. Important habitat for wintering wildfowl, mainly duck and whooper swans. Few other areas of open water occur in the county.
35. Ross & Glennis eskers N 06 08 25 ha	Grassland	Ecological Geomorphological	An interesting and rich mixture of calcicole plant species occurs on these eskers, including such plants as the burnet rose, <u>Rosa pimpinellifolia</u> , and golden rod, <u>Solidago</u> , in a turf of low growing grasses. Hazel scrub appears to the west as Ross Wood.

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Sites of Scientific Importance which have been identified since 1981

Name of Area	Habitat	Interest Local Importance	Description
Screggan N 287 195 54 hectares	Raised bog	Ecological	Pine bog with interesting bog vegetation
Canal at Tullamore N 34 26	Canal	Ecological	The Canal here contains a plant species which is preserved under the 1977 Wildlife Act
Canal below Kilbeggan N 33 36	Canal	Ecological	The Canal here contains a plant species which is preserved under the 1977 Wildlife Act
Shannonharbour N 03 18	Canal	Ecological	The Canal here contains a plant species which is preserved under the 1977 Wildlife Act
Monaincha Bog near Roscrea S 17 87	Raised bog	Ecological	The vegetation on this raised bog is of considerable botanical interest

