

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH GARR BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 001812

Lough Garr Bog NHA is located approximately 16 km north-west of Mullingar on the main Longford road, in the townlands of Corydonnellan, Cappagh and Joanstown, Co. Westmeath. The site comprises of a mosaic of habitats which include a small raised bog, marsh, wet woodland, humid grassland and dry grassland. The site is bounded by a main road to the west and local roads to the south and east.

The raised bog on the site consists of two areas of high bog, which have been divided by a bog road. The bog surface is relatively dry. There is a flush located in the south-west section of the high bog and a marsh occurs to the east of the site in what was once Lough Garr lake. Cutover is found all around the north, west and south of the site and along the bog road. Cutover supports wet woodland, scrub and humid grassland.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, mainly dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). There is frequent Crossed-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and White-beaked sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). The bog mosses *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. tenellum* and *S. magellanicum* are also present. The midland indicator species Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum magellanicum* are also found on the bog. There are no pools on the bog but there is a sizeable (5.5 ha) flush to the south-west of the site. The south-eastern lobe of the high bog and adjoining cutover has been afforested.

Cutover areas of the bog support wet grassland, dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*). Along the south-west margin of the site there are patches of wet woodland on cutover with Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Goat Willow (*Salix caprea* agg) and Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*). The understorey is dominated by Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Purple Moor-grass. Heathy scrub areas are dominated by Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Downy Birch and Ling Heather.

An area of species-rich wet marsh occurs in a very wet lagg area in the cutover located on the south-west of margin of the site. Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*) are the dominant species with Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Soft Rush and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).

The wet marsh with floating scraw which occupies the area that was once Lough Garr, supports homogeneous vegetation which is dominated mainly by Creeping Bent, Cowbane (*Cicuta virosa*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*). Other common species include Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Common Marsh-bedstraw, Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and Branched Bur-reed (*Sparaganium erectum*). Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudocarus*) occasionally form small dominant patches. Other species present include Nodding Bur-marigold (*Bidens cernua*) and Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*). There is luxuriant moss cover, which include *Calliergon giganteum* and *Calliergonella cuspidata*. To the west of the marsh there is a slightly drier area with Devil's-bit Scabious, Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Common Valerian, Bottle Sedge, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Water Horsetail and Common Sorrel. This vegetation grades into the Downy Birch wet woodland by the high bog .

The transitional zone between the marsh and the high bog has an interesting vegetation composition. Downy Birch and Eared Willow form a patchy canopy over Bilberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum capillifolium*. Jointed Rush can be locally abundant. Ling Heather, Devils-bit Scabious, Bogbean and Water Horsetail are also found here. Mosses found in this habitat include *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Pleurozium schreberi*.

Current landuse on the site includes forestry, peat-cutting, dumping and grazing. There is limited peat-cutting along the bog road and most of the cutover has been abandoned. The south-east of the site, including high bog and cutover, has been afforested. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage and burning of the high bog. Dumping takes place on the site, particularly by the road which runs through the centre of the bog. These activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Lough Garr Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising as it does a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. There is an interesting transition zone between marsh and high bog on this site which supports a good range of plant species. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for the conservation of this habitat at an international level.

14.11.2002