



APPENDIX 7-9

**SITE SYNOPSES FOR
DESIGNATED SITES**

APPENDIX 7-9

Site Synopses for Designated Sites

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH CROAN TURLOUGH SPA

SITE CODE: 004139

Situated approximately 6 km east of the River Suck in Co. Roscommon, Lough Croan Turlough is a linear wetland, aligned north-west/south-east, which lies in a flattish area of glacial till. It is split into two main parts - the east functions as a typical turlough, with a wet, reedy centre, while the west is a fen, floating in places, which also floods in winter.

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, Shoveler and Golden Plover. 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 Croan supports nationally important numbers of Greenland White-fronted Goose (164) - mean peak counts for the period 1994/95 to 1998/99. The geese that utilise this site are part of an internationally important flock that are based along the River Suck. The site also supports nationally important populations of Shoveler (157), and Golden Plover (2,025) - figures are mean peak counts for four of the five winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000. The Shoveler population is one of the largest in the country. Other species that occur at the site include Whooper Swan (15), Wigeon (392), Gadwall (7), Teal (330), Mallard (56), Pintail (22), Lapwing (661), Curlew (93) and Black-headed Gull (59). Some of these species use the turlough both as a feeding and roost site.

Lough Croan is also a site for breeding birds - Pochard and Shoveler, which are both rare breeding species in Ireland, have bred at the site in recent years and it is considered that they probably attempt to nest every year. Mute Swan also breeds and Black-headed Gull has bred in the past.

Lough Croan Turlough SPA is of high ornithological importance, primarily for its Greenland White-fronted Goose population, but also because of its nationally important Shoveler and Golden Plover populations. The presence of Greenland White-fronted Goose, Golden Plover and Whooper Swan is of particular note as these are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of the site is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

22.4.2010

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: RIVER SUCK CALLOWS SPA

SITE CODE: 004097

The River Suck Callows SPA is a linear, sinuous site comprising a section of the River Suck from Castlecoote, Co. Roscommon to its confluence with the River Shannon close to Shannonbridge, a distance of approximately 70 km along the course of the river. The river forms part of the boundary between Counties Galway and Roscommon. The site includes the River Suck itself and the adjacent areas of seasonally-flooded semi-natural lowland wet callow grassland. The River Suck is the largest tributary of the River Shannon.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Wigeon, Golden Plover and Lapwing. 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 River Suck Callows SPA is an important site for wintering waterfowl. Of particular note is the nationally important Greenland White-fronted Goose flock (293 – five year mean peak for the period 1994/95 to 1998/99) which congregates mainly in the middle reaches of the river. Four other species occur in populations of national importance, i.e. Whooper Swan (164), Wigeon (3,232), Golden Plover (2,241) and Lapwing (3,906) – all figures are five year mean peaks from aerial surveys between 2001/02 and 2005/06. Other species present include Mute Swan (122), Teal (402), Mallard (70), Black-tailed Godwit (24), Curlew (22) and Black-headed Gull (86).

The River Suck Callows SPA is of considerable ornithological importance, in particular for the presence of nationally important populations of five species. Of note is that three of the species that occur regularly, i.e. Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose and Golden Plover, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of the River Suck Callows SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: FOUR ROADS TURLOUGH SPA

SITE CODE: 004140

Four Roads Turlough (also known as Cloonlaughnan Turlough) is located 6 km south of Athleague, Co. Roscommon and just over 2 km east of the River Suck. It lies below a low scarp of limestone hills and is an open, shallow basin without permanent standing water which floods regularly and dries out early.

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 and Golden Plover. 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.

Four Roads Turlough is an important site for wintering waterfowl. In most winters it is visited by the nationally important River Suck population of Greenland White-fronted Goose (93 – four year mean peak for four of the five winters between 1994/95 and 1998/99). The site also supports a nationally important population of Golden Plover (3,717) – all figures are mean peaks for three of the five winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000). Other species which occur regularly include Wigeon (307), Teal (657), Mallard (84), Shoveler (28) and Lapwing (1,521). It is also occasionally used by Whooper Swan. Breeding species include Lapwing and Snipe. Much of the site is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

Four Roads Turlough SPA is of ornithological importance because it is regularly utilised by the nationally important River Suck Greenland White-fronted Goose flock. A nationally important population of Golden Plover also occurs at the site. The regular occurrence of these two species, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is of note.

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH REE SPA

SITE CODE: 004064

Situated on the River Shannon between Lanesborough and Athlone, Lough Ree is the third largest lake in the Republic of Ireland. It lies in an ice-deepened depression in Carboniferous Limestone. Some of its features (including the islands) are based on glacial drift. The main inflowing rivers are the Shannon, Inny and Hind, and the main outflowing river is the Shannon. The greater part of Lough Ree is less than 10 m in depth, but there are six deep troughs running from north to south, reaching a maximum depth of about 36 m just west of Inchmore. The lake has a very long, indented shoreline and hence has many sheltered bays. It also has a good scattering of islands, most of which are included in the site.

Beds of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) are an extensive habitat in a number of the more sheltered places around the lake; monodominant stands of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Saw Sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) also occur as swamps in suitable places. Some of these grade into species-rich calcareous fen or freshwater marsh. Lowland wet grassland, some of which floods in winter, occurs frequently around the shore.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Little Grebe, Coot, Golden Plover, Lapwing 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 Ree is one of the most important Midland sites for wintering waterfowl, with nationally important populations of Little Grebe (52), Whooper Swan (139), Wigeon (2,070), Teal (1,474), Mallard (1,087), Shoveler (54), Tufted Duck (1,012), Goldeneye (205), Coot (338), Golden Plover (3,058) and Lapwing (5,793) – all figures are three year mean peaks for the period 1997/98 to 1999/2000. Other species which occur in winter include Great Crested Grebe (29), Cormorant (99), Curlew (254) and Black-headed Gull (307) as well as the resident Mute Swan (85). Greenland White-fronted Goose has been recorded on occasion on the flooded margins of the site.

The site supports a nationally important population of Common Tern (90 pairs in 1995). It is a traditional breeding site for Black-headed Gull and whilst a full survey has not been carried out in recent years, substantial numbers of nesting birds were present on at least one island in 2003. Lesser Black-backed Gull and Common Gull have bred in the past and may still breed. Lough Ree is a noted site for breeding duck and grebes: Tufted Duck (202 pairs) and Great Crested Grebe (32 pairs) – records from 1995. Of particular note is that Lough Ree is one of the two main sites in the

country for breeding Common Scoter, a Red Data Book species. Surveys have recorded 39 pairs and 32 pairs in 1995 and 1999 respectively. Cormorant also breeds on some of the islands within the site – 86 nests were recorded in 2010. The woodland around the lake is a stronghold for Garden Warbler and this scarce species probably occurs on some of the islands within the site.

Lough Ree SPA is of high ornithological importance for both wintering and breeding birds. It supports nationally important populations of eleven wintering waterfowl species. The site has a range of breeding waterfowl species, notably nationally important populations of Common Scoter and Common Tern. Of particular note is the regular presence of three species, Whooper Swan, Golden Plover and Common Tern, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Parts of Lough Ree SPA are Wildfowl Sanctuaries.

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MIDDLE SHANNON CALLOWS SPA

SITE CODE: 004096

The Middle Shannon Callows SPA is a long and diverse site which extends for approximately 50 km from the town of Athlone to the town of Portumna; it lies within Counties Galway, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly and Tipperary. The site averages about 0.75 km in width though in places is up to 1.5 km wide. Water levels on the site are greatly influenced by the very small fall between Athlone and Portumna and by the weir at Meelick. The site has extensive areas of callow, or seasonally flooded, semi-natural, lowland wet grassland, along both sides of the river. The callows are mainly too soft for intensive farming but are used for hay or silage or for summer grazing. Other habitats of smaller area which occur alongside the river include lowland dry grassland, freshwater marshes, reedbeds and wet woodland. The diversity of semi-natural habitats present and the sheer size of the site attract an excellent diversity of bird species, including significant populations of several.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Corncrake, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Black-Headed Gull. It 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 Middle Shannon Callows qualifies as a site of international importance as it regularly supports in excess of 20,000 wintering waterbirds (23,656 – four year mean peak for four of the winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000). The site also supports internationally important populations of Whooper Swan (305 – five year mean peak for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000) and Black-tailed Godwit (485 – four year mean peak for four of the winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000). Four further species of wintering waterbird occur in numbers of national importance, i.e. Wigeon (3,059), Golden Plover (4,133), Lapwing (13,240) and Black-headed Gull (1,209) – all figures are four year mean peaks for four of the winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000.

The Shannon Callows is the largest site monitored as part of I-WeBS and many parts of it are inaccessible on the ground. Annual monitoring of the wintering waterbirds of the Shannon Callows is undertaken by aerial surveys in January/February with some areas also covered by ground counts. The importance of the site for some species may have been underestimated if count coverage missed the brief spring peaks for these species, e.g. peak counts of Lapwing (23,409) and Black-tailed Godwit (1,096) recorded in the baseline period (1995/96 to 1999/2000) have been considerably higher than the four year means. A wide range of other species occurs within the site, including Mute Swan (407), Teal (88), Tufted Duck (41), Dunlin

(335), Curlew (162) and Redshank (39). Small numbers of Greenland White-fronted Goose use the Shannon Callows (peak 55 in 1998/99) and these are generally associated with larger flocks which occur on the adjacent Little Brosna Callows and River Suck Callows. The callow grasslands provide optimum feeding grounds for these various species of waterfowl, while many of the birds also roost or rest within the site.

The Shannon Callows is also an important site for breeding waders with the total population on the Shannon and Little Brosna Callows being one of three major concentrations in Ireland and Britain in 1987. Numbers of some species have declined since then but a survey of the Shannon Callows in 2002 recorded the following breeding waders - Lapwing (63 pairs), Redshank (116 pairs), Snipe (139 drumming birds) and Curlew (8 pairs). Black-tailed Godwit, a very rare breeding species in Ireland, nests or attempts to nest in small numbers each year within the site. A further scarce breeding species, Shoveler, also nests in small numbers each year (an estimated 12 pairs in 1987).

The Middle Shannon Callows SPA supports a breeding population of Corncrake (19 pairs - five year mean peak between 2003 and 2007, based on records of calling males).

Corncrake winter in southern and eastern Africa, migrating northwards to arrive on their breeding grounds from early April onwards, departing again in August and September. They require the cover of tall vegetation throughout their breeding cycle and are strongly associated with meadows which are harvested annually, where they nest and feed. Annual cutting of these meadows creates a sward which is easy for the birds to move through. Other habitats, which can provide cover for Corncrake in the early and late stages of the breeding season, are also important for this species.

Corncrake is listed on the 2010 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. This is due to population and range declines of more than 50% in the last 25 years across significant parts of its range.

Quail, a related, scarce species, is also known to breed within the callow grasslands.

A good variety of other bird species are attracted to the site. Birds of prey, including scarce species such as Merlin and wintering Hen Harrier have been recorded hunting over the callows. A range of passerine species associated with grassland and swamp vegetation breed, including Sedge Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Skylark and Reed Bunting. Kingfisher is also known to occur within the site. Whinchat, an uncommon breeding species, occurs in small numbers.

The Middle Shannon Callows SPA is an internationally important site that supports an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. It holds internationally important populations of two species - Whooper Swan and Black-tailed Godwit. In addition, there are four species that have wintering populations of national importance. The site also supports a nationally important breeding population of Corncrake. Of particular note is that several of the species which occur regularly are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Whooper Swan, Corncrake and Golden Plover.

10.1.2012

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SUCK RIVER CALLOWS NHA

SITE CODE: 000222

The Suck River Callows is a long sinuous area of semi-natural lowland wet grassland, which floods extensively each winter along the River Suck between Castlecoote in the north and Shannonbridge in the south, passing through Ballinasloe. The Suck River forms the Roscommon - Galway county boundary and joins the River Shannon at Shannonbridge. Along most of its borders, former raised bogs (now in the process of large-scale harvesting by Bord na Móna) are present. Just south of Ballyforan, there is a small intact raised bog on the eastern bank of the river, which contains both high bog and cutover. This is situated in the townlands of Ballina, Ballyforan, Coolatober and Cloonagh, Co. Roscommon and can be accessed from a road to the east.

The main habitat of the Suck River Callows is flood meadows of wet grassland and the associated aquatic and semi-aquatic habitats of drainage ditches. Secondary habitats of importance, which directly border the callows within the site are species-rich dry and wet calcareous grassland, flooded fen, wet woodland and a small raised bog with a tear pool system. There is a semi-natural margin between this raised bog and the river. Improved grasslands are also included within the site at the upper margin of wet grasslands.

The wet grassland vegetation consists of Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*), Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*). Many of these species are important food plants for the wintering wildfowl which also forage on the improved grasslands within the site. A large area of flooded fen with Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) occurs to the north of Derrycahill Bridge. Small patches of Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) occur in shallows along the river margin.

At Ballyforan the small intact raised bog has been classified as a True Midland Raised Bog. The vegetation of the high bog has been affected by burning and is dominated by Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), however, there is active Bog Moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) regeneration occurring. Species occurring on the site include *Sphagnum fuscum*, *S. imbricatum* and *S. capillifolium*, *S. cuspidatum* (in elongated tear pools), Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*), Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora fusca*) and Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*). Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*), cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) occur in the unburnt areas. The bog appears to be drying out and the western margin has been invaded by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*).

At Ballyforan Bog, the cutover to the south of the high bog is primarily reclaimed grassland. There is an uninterrupted transition from this high bog to low-lying callow grassland to the west. Active peat-cutting occurs to the north-west and east with some scrub encroachment on old cutover.

There are also small areas of cutover at the margins of the developed (cut-away) raised bogs on the banks of the River Suck. Some of this cutover is very wet, bordering on to floodmeadows and contains permanent pools with Lesser Bladderwort. Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*), cottongrasses and orchids (*Dactylorhiza* spp.) have been recorded on these cutover areas. Regenerating birch and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) woods occurs on old cutover margins throughout the site. These wet woodlands have an understory of Ling Heather and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*).

The Suck River Callows is an important site for wintering waterfowl. Of particular note is the internationally important flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese based along the Suck. The birds congregate mainly in the middle reaches of the river. A separate sub-flock is centred at Glenamaddy turlough. The average maximum winter count for the period 1988/89 to 1993/94 was 386. In recent years, the only complete count of waterfowl for the site was in January 2002. Three species had populations of national importance: Whooper Swan 124, Wigeon 1,203 and Lapwing 3,640. Other species which were present included Mute Swan 90, Teal 325, Pintail 5 and Curlew 67. Of the species which occur regularly at this site, Greenland White-fronted Geese and Whooper Swan are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. A further Annex I species, Golden Plover, occurs at times. The good quality riverine and grassland habitats are also home to populations of Otter and Irish Hare, and Brown Trout occur in the river.

Current landuses on the site include, agriculture, active peat-cutting, forestry and conservation. The wet grasslands of the callows are used for agriculture. At Ballyforan Bog, active peat-cutting is most prevalent to the north-west and along the eastern margin of the high bog. The cutover to the south has been reclaimed for agriculture. There are extensive areas of peat-cutting by Bord na Móna along the boundaries of the site and a large area of callow and esker has been recently planted with forestry. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include habitat loss and drainage throughout the site and burning of the high bog. These activities have all resulted in the loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the raised bog, and pose a continuing threat to its viability. There is a no-shooting area at Muckanagh, north of Ballyforan.

The Suck River Callows NHA, along with the River Shannon Callows cSAC (216) and River Little Brosna Callows NHA (564), form by far the largest area of lowland wet grassland in Ireland and Britain. These callows are each designated as a Special Protection Area under the E.U. Birds Directive for the presence of Internationally and Nationally Important numbers of wintering waterfowl.

The presence of raised bog is of considerable conservation significance as it is a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in

Ireland. The site supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats, including hummocks and pools. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level. The site is of major ornithological importance.

14.11.2002

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CRANBERRY LOUGH

SITE CODE: 001630

Cranberry Lough is a unique and botanically rich lake occupying a low-lying area within a raised bog near Ballydangan, County Roscommon. The eastern side of the lake is formed by the dry margins of the bog which is colonised mainly by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). The western side of the site is bounded by a mature conifer plantation. In between the lake and forestry, an extensive area of reed-beds has developed adjacent to the raised bog which on the western side is colonised by tall willow (*Salix* spp.) scrub.

The dense swards of emergent vegetation in the reed-beds are comprised of Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Lesser Tussock-sedge (*Carex diandra*). The open water is colonised by floating plants such as the Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*) and Common Duckweed (*Lemna minor*).

A 'scraw' or floating mat of vegetation separates the lake in two parts. It is based on Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and the colourful Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) and supports an abundance of *Spaghnum* and other mosses. Where more acidic conditions prevail, Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) occur with sedges such as Bog-sedge (*Carex limosa*) and Dioecious Sedge (*Carex dioica*). In other areas of the scraw, more herb rich communities occur. These areas are comprised of an unusual abundance of Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and other flowering herbs such as Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) and Hoary Willowherb (*Epilobium parviflorum*).

Cranberry Lough is in a very natural, undisturbed location and is quite attractive to wildlife in the area. Nesting bird species recorded include Sedge Warbler, Reed Bunting, Snipe, Curlew, Little Grebe and Moorhen. Whooper Swans have also been observed here in the winter.

24.11.2009