

Country: Ireland

Ref: 7IE038

Lough Corrib

Lough Corrib, situated north of Galway city is the second largest lake in Ireland. The lake itself has an area of approximately 18,240 ha. with a catchment twice this size. The lake can be divided into two parts: a smaller shallower basin to the south and a larger deeper basin to the north. These two parts are connected by a narrow channel. In the southern and eastern parts of the lake the lake bed is dominated by limestone bedrock covered by deposits of precipitated marl. The surrounding land is mostly pastoral farmland to the south and east and bog to the west and north. In addition to the lake basin, some areas of scientific interest adjoining the lake e.g. woodland, callows grassland and raised bog, have been incorporated into the site.

The lake supports one of the largest areas of wetland vegetation in the country. This vegetation is best developed in the shallower southern basin of the lake just north of Galway city. The shallow lime-rich waters in this area support the most extensive beds of Charophytes (*Chara* spp.) in Ireland. These beds are an important source of food for wildfowl. There are large areas of reedswamp vegetation dominated varying mixtures of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Saw Sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and this reedswamp usually grades into species-rich marsh vegetation characterised by Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Bog Bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Other habitats occurring in some quantity include, calcareous fen dominated by Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and wet grassland dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*).

In addition to the lake itself, areas of interest adjoining the lake have been incorporated into the site. These areas add to the habitat diversity. The hill of Doon, located in the north-western corner of the lake, is a fine example of a Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) woodland. The understorey is dominated by Sessile Oak and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and occasional Juniper (*Juniperus communis*). There is a species-rich ground layer dominated by Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and Wood Rush (*Luzula sylvatica*).

Addergoole bog, one of the best remaining examples of a raised bog in Ireland, is also included in the site. The bog occurs along the eastern shore of the lake 5km north of Galway City, between the Clare and Cregg rivers. It is the most westerly, semi-intact, raised bog in the country and has well developed surface features such as bog pools dominated by *Sphagnum cuspidatum*. The bog also has a small soak area containing a Birch (*Betula pubescens*) woodland. Soak systems are now a very rare feature of Irish raised bogs.

Other habitats present within the site include lake islands with semi-natural deciduous woodland, callows grassland, limestone pavement and improved grassland. The latter areas are included in the site because they are used as feeding grounds by waterfowl.

The site contains a number of rare and threatened plant species. Irish Lady's Tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*) has been recorded from a number of lake shore sites in the north-west of the site and Wood Bitter Vetch (*Vicia orobus*) has been seen recently on some of the lake islands. Both of these species are protected under the Flora Protection Order

(1987). The Stoneworts *Chara contraria* and *Chara aspera* have been recorded from the southern part of the lake. Both of these species are listed in the Red Data Book as being rare in Ireland. Other threatened species recorded recently in the site are Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). Both of these threatened species are listed in the Irish Red Data Book.

The lake is a very important site for waterfowl. Counts from 1984 to 1987 revealed a mean annual peak total of 19,994 birds. In the past a maximum peak of 38,281 birds was recorded. The lake supports internationally important numbers of Pochard (average peak 8,600) and nationally important numbers of the following species: Coot (average peak 6,756), Mute Swan (average peak 176), Tufted Duck (average peak 1,317), Cormorant (average peak 110) and Greenland White-fronted Goose (average peak 83). The Coot population is the largest in the country and populations of Tufted Duck and Pochard are second only to Lough Neagh. Up to 10 breeding pairs of Common Scoter also occur on the lake, an internationally important breeding number. Other bird species of note recorded from or close to the lake recently include Hen Harrier, Kingfisher and breeding populations of Arctic and Common Terns.

Lough Corrib is a well known fishing lake with a very good Trout (*Salmo trutta*) fishery. The lake has a non-migratory population of Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), a scarce, though probably under-recorded species listed in Annex II of E.U. Habitats Directive.

Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) also use the lake as a spawning ground. Although this species is still fished commercially in Ireland, it is considered to be endangered or locally threatened elsewhere in Europe and is listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive. Another fish species considered endangered throughout Europe present in the lake is Arctic Charr (*Salvelinus alpinus*).

The Otter has been recorded regularly within this site. This species is listed in the Red Data Book as it is considered threatened in Europe. The species is legally protected under the Wildlife Act 1976.

Lough Corrib is the only known site in Ireland and Britain for *Corynocera ambigua*. Outside of Ireland this chironomid is mostly confined to arctic-alpine areas.

The main threats to the quality of this site are fishing and shooting pressure and the uncontrolled discharge of sewage which is causing eutrophication of the lake. Both of these damaging practices are particularly severe in the smaller, southern part of the lake. Despite this ongoing interference however, Lough Corrib is the best example of a large, limestone lake in Ireland and is one of the best examples in the E.U. In addition to the presence of threatened habitats e.g. raised bog, Saw Sedge swamp and limestone pavement, the site supports a range of rare and threatened plant and animal species. Features of the site which are of greatest interest are the presence of extensive Chara beds and the large wintering populations of wildfowl, especially Pochard and Tufted Duck.