

1. Country: Ireland
2. Date: 16 February 1995
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4. Lough Derravaragh

Lough Derravaragh is located approx. 12km north of Mullingar town. The River Inny, which is a major tributary of the River Shannon, flows into and out of the lake at its north-west end. At this end, the lake is wide and shallow and is backed by raised or cutaway bog. In contrast, the lake's south-eastern arm is narrow, running between resistant limestone outcrops which slope steeply to the lakeshore. The lake is shallow and its water is hard with an alkaline pH.

A notable feature of Lough Derravaragh is the range of aquatic lower plant (*Charophyte*) species which occur here. Eight species have been recorded, several of which are restricted in their distribution in Ireland. Around the lake margin, a range of habitats have been created as a result of drainage of the River Inny. At the western end are extensive reedbeds and swamps dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) with scattered stands of Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Willows (*Salix* spp.). Elsewhere, there is freshwater marsh vegetation dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.) and often tussock-forming grasses (e.g. *Deschampsia caespitosa* and *Festuca* sp.), with a range of flowering herbs including Nodding Bur-Marigold (*Bidens cernua*) and Trifid Bur-Marigold (*Bidens tripartita*). The lakeshore is a mineral-rich substrate and thus several plant species of poor fen habitats are abundant, such as Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Long-stalked Yellow Sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*).

Small areas of raised bog adjoin the lake at its western end. Here, the wet surface mostly consists of an undulating carpet of *Sphagnum* moss, Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Hares-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) are abundant. Cutaway areas are abundantly colonised by Scot's Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) with occasional Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*).

Knockeyon and the other hills around the south-eastern end of the lake support deciduous woodland which comprises mostly native species. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) are abundant. Exotic species occur occasionally, including Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).

*Chara denudata*, an aquatic *charophyte* species, has been recorded in Lough Derravaragh. This rare plant occurs in only five sites in Co. Westmeath, is restricted to highly calcareous lakes and is intolerant of pollution. The species is listed in the Charophyte Red Data Book.

Lough Derravaragh holds nationally important numbers of Pochard (average peak 933), Tufted Duck (average peak 451), Coot (average peak 315), Mute Swan (average peak 137) (counts from 1984/5 to 1986/7).

The following insects have been recorded in Lough Derravaragh (all three are in Order

*Trichoptera*): *Metatype fragilis* and *Limnephillis nigriceps*, also *Tinodes maculicornis* which is of European significance.

This site is a valuable habitat for Otter, a species listed in Annex II of EU Habitats Directive.

The lake is an important amenity for anglers, as it holds a population of Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*). Knockbody Wood is used for shooting Pheasant. Local groups use the lake for canoeing and watersports. The fish and wildfowl are threatened by pollution of the lake with organic farm material, and a degree of eutrophication is indicated by the presence of green algae along Lough Derravaragh's shores.

The lake is significant as a habitat for wildfowl, fish and otters, as well as for lower plants and insects, some of which are of European significance. Although bird numbers have declined significantly since the 1970's, Lough Derravaragh's remaining wildfowl populations are less erratic than on other lakes in the locality, so its importance is still considerable.