



Barnesmore Gap Greenway

Appendix 7.1: Site Descriptions

Donegal County Council

1. Site Descriptions

1.1 Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC

The description of the Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2026) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2018) for the site. Priority habitats are highlighted with an asterisk '*'.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [1140] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
- [2130] Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)
- [2170] Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (*Salicion arenariae*)
- [2190] Humid dune slacks
- [1365] Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Site Overview

This site occupies the inner part of Donegal Bay, immediately to the south-west of Donegal Town. It contains the estuary of the River Eske and a number of other significant rivers. The area is underlain by Carboniferous limestone and shale, although blown sand and other recent deposits obscure much of the solid geology.

Most of the site consists of intertidal habitats, notably mud- and sandflats, sea inlets and bays, tidal rivers, estuarine channels and sandy beaches. These areas are generally unvegetated but are obviously nutrient-rich, as extensive beds of shellfish occur in parts of the bay. The following macro-invertebrate species are common throughout much of the bay: *Arenicola marina*, *Hediste diversicolor*, *Scrobicularia plana* and *Macoma balthica*.

Along some parts of the shore, saltmarsh has developed. Dominant plants there include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*). Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*), Sharp Rush (*Juncus acutus*) and Saltmarsh Rush (*J. gerardi*) are also common, while brown seaweeds (*Fucus* spp.) are abundant lower down the shore profile.

On the stable parts of some of the shingle and boulder beaches, Common Scurvygrass also occurs, along with Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*).

Sand dunes, including fixed dunes, occur in parts of the site, especially at Murvagh. Intact sections contain Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) and Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) in the young dunes, with abundant Marram in the fixed dunes. These stable areas are frequently species-rich, with abundant Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*), a well-developed moss community including *Thuidium tamariscinum* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, and herbs such as Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*),

Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*). Dune slacks also occur and in one slack the Red Data Book species Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) occurs. Typical species of dunes with Creeping Willow occur at Mullanasole and include: Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*), Sand sedge (*Carex arenaria*), Red Fescue, Lady's Bedstraw, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) along with other typical species of fixed dune including: False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Wild Thyme and the mosses *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*. The Common Twayblade orchid (*Listera ovata*) occurs throughout this habitat. Other species present include: Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Marram Grass and the moss *Pleurozium schreberi*.

Both Common Scoter and Brent Goose are found in the greater Donegal Bay area, from Bundoran north to Murvagh. The Bay provides one of the most important sites in the country for the Common Scoter, with peak numbers of approximately 1,500 individuals in 1984/85 - 1986/87. This species uses large wintering grounds making counts difficult, but in recent

years peaks of 662 birds (1995/96) and 1,073 birds (1997/98) have been recorded in the area. Other wintering species of note from the site include Ringed Plover 175, Oystercatcher 119 and Dunlin 221 (data based on 18 counts from 1984/85 - 1986/87). Small numbers (up to 50) of Greenland White-fronted Goose from the Pettigo flock fed at Inishpat Island in the 1980s, but have rarely done so in recent years.

The site supports a population of Common Seal (maximum count of 148 in the all-Ireland survey of 2003). This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

1.2 Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC

The description of the Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2019) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2015) the for the site. Priority habitats are highlighted with an asterisk '*'.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*)
- [7220] Petrifying Springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion)*
- [91A0] Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles
- [1029] Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)
- [1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- [1421] Killarney Fern (*Vandenboschia speciosa*)

Site Overview

Lough Eske is a large lowland oligotrophic lake. It lies approximately 5 km north-east of Donegal town at the junction of Carboniferous rocks with more resistant Dalradian gneiss and granite. The site also includes the River Eske and short stretches of the Lowerymore, Clogher and Drummenny Rivers, as well as a number of smaller tributaries.

The shore of Lough Eske has a diverse and interesting flora which reflects the contrasting geology within the site. It includes heath-covered peninsulas, rocky shores, small flushes, wet and dry woodland fringes, occasional reedbeds of *Phragmites australis*, small freshwater marshes and some interesting species-poor fen communities (particularly on the northern shore of the lake) which are typified by Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*). In addition there are also small, but relatively intact, very wet areas of blanket bog.

Ardnamona Wood, on the western side of the lake, is an old oak woodland. It is of great scientific interest for its size, naturalness and flora. It displays a habitat range from dry areas dominated by Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) to wet woodland with Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) also occur in the high canopy with Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Willow (*Salix* spp.) in the understorey. Oak and Birch woodland is also found along the valley of the Lowerymore River. The north side of this valley also has some petrifying springs, a priority Annex I habitat under the E.U. Habitats Directive. These all possess moss species which are diagnostic of the habitat, such as *Cratoneuron commutatum*, *C. filicinum* and *Eucladium verticillatum*.

The Killarney Fern (*Vandenboschia speciosa*), a Red Data Book species listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive and included under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2022, occurs in the site. Two other rare plants, Whorled Caraway (*Carum verticillatum*) and Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*), are also present.

Important animals recorded from the site include good populations of Atlantic Salmon and Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*), both listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and the Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), a rare fish listed in the Red Data Book of Irish vertebrates. The Eske system is an important multi-sea-winter (spring salmon) stock, one of the few rivers nationally to hold 3-sea-winter fish over 20 lb.

This site contains three habitats listed in the E.U. Habitats Directive - lowland oligotrophic lake, petrifying springs and old oak woodland. Three species which are also included in the Habitats Directive - the Killarney Fern, the Atlantic Salmon and the Freshwater Pearl Mussel - are also present in the site.

1.3 Croaghonagh Bog SAC

The description of the Croaghonagh Bog SAC is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2017a) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2013a) the for the site. Priority habitats are highlighted with an asterisk ‘*’.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[7130] Blanket Bogs (* if active bog)

Site Overview

Croaghonagh Bog is a small but quite intact blanket bog which occurs on the south-west shore of Lough Mourne, 17km north-east of Donegal town. The site is underlain by metamorphosed sandstone and includes a good diversity of habitats including active bog, wet heath, lakeshore, streams and ditches, and some old cut-away bog.

Croaghonagh Bog displays some features of a raised bog and consists of a large, broad dome divided into two parts by dry, narrow channels, some of which contain swallow-holes. There is also a small lake in the middle of the site. The bog surface is spongy or quaking in localised areas, and contains a variety of features including widespread hummock/hollow communities and some large bog pools. There is an extensive cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), including several species of note such as *S. fuscum*, *S. imbricatum* and *S. magellanicum*. Other species recorded here include Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*), Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*) and Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*). Hummock vegetation includes Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Hare’s-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and *Cladonia* lichens.

Bird species recorded from the site include Greenland White-fronted Goose and Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), both of which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, along with Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus hibernicus*), Curlew and Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). Deer, Otter and Hare also occur on the site.

1.4 River Finn SAC

The description of the River Finn SAC is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2017b) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2014a) the for the site. Priority habitats are highlighted with an asterisk ‘*’.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*)

[4010] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*

[7130] Blanket Bogs (* if active bog)

[7140] Transition mires and quaking bogs

[1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)

[1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Site Overview

This site comprises almost the entire freshwater element of the River Finn and its tributaries the Corlacky, the Reelan sub-catchment, the Sruhamboy, Elatagh, Cummirk and Glashagh, and also includes Lough Finn, where the river rises. The spawning grounds at the headwaters

of the Mourne and Derg Rivers, Loughs Derg and Belshade and the tidal stretch of the Foyle north of Lifford to the border are also part of the site. The Finn and Reelan, rising in the Bluestack Mountains, drain a catchment area of 195 square miles. All of the site is in Co. Donegal. The underlying geology is Dalradian Schists and Gneiss for the most part though quartzites and Carboniferous Limestones are present in the vicinity of Castlefinn. The hills around Lough Finn are also on quartzite. The mountains of Owendoo and Cloghervaddy are of granite felsite and other intrusive rocks rich in silica. There are many towns along the river but not within the site, including Lifford, Castlefinn, Stranolar and Ballybofey.

Upland blanket bog occurs throughout much of the upland area of the site along the edges of the river. However, more extensive examples are found at Tullytresna and in the Owendoo/Cloghervaddy bogs. The blanket bog is dominated by Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). Pool and hummock systems are a feature of the flatter areas, with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), mosses (*Racomitrium lanuginosum*, *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. papillosum*), lichens (e.g. *Cladonia portentosa*) and the liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea* occurring abundantly on the hummocks. The scarce bog boss *S. imbricatum* is a component of some hummocks. *Sphagnum magellanicum* is found in wet flats by pools, while *S. cuspidatum* occurs abundantly within the pools themselves.

Towards the base of the northern slope and on the southern slope at Tullytresna flushes occur with bright green lawns of bog mosses and abundant rushes, particularly Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Jointed Rush (*J. articulatus*). On the summit is an undulating system of hummocks and hollows, and Heather is more common.

A valley bog fills the low-lying areas to the north-east of Lough Finn which is dominated by Deergrass, cottongrass, Purple Moor-grass and Heather. Mossy hummocks occur in the wetter areas.

Transition mires (or quaking bogs or scraws) occur at several locations, usually at the interface between bog and lake or stream. In Owendoo/Cloghervaddy there are many examples of small lakes south of Belshade. Some of the lakes contain floating scraws of the bog moss *S. recurvum*, Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Bog-sedge (*C. limosa*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). West of Owendoo River there is an extensive area of scraw with a similar suite of species but in differing abundances. Quaking areas are also associated with blanket bog at Cronamuck and Cronakerny. At Cronamuck, a small, level flushed area occurs at the base of a slope leading into a flushed stream. Diversity, including diagnostic species, is good.

Wet heath is associated with the blanket bog throughout the site and is found on the shallow peats and better drained slopes. In Owendoo/Cloghervaddy this is mostly characterised by Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Heather, Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). The heath often grades into flush vegetation dominated by Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*).

Lowland oligotrophic lakes are found at Loughs Finn, Belshade and Derg, as well as in many of the smaller lakes within the site. Lough Derg is a large oligotrophic lake situated north of Pettigo. An extensive area of blanket bogs and conifer plantations make up the lake catchment. Typical species seen at the three lakes include a sparse covering of Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) along the lake shores, Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*), the moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*, Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), with Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) and Broad-leaved Pondweed (*P. natans*) in the margins.

On the tidal stretches within the site the main habitats are the river itself, mudflats and the extensive reedbeds that have colonised the former mudflats. The habitats found are typically freshwater in nature. The large reedbeds are dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), with some Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*). Succession is demonstrated nicely within a small area, with the change from mudflats to reedbeds, and on to willow (*Salix* spp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) scrub.

Other habitats present within the site include a fringe of wet grassland/marsh along some river stretches dominated by rushes, grading into species-rich marsh in which sedges are common. Among the other species found in this habitat are Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Water Mint

(*Mentha aquatica*), Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and Soft Rush. Around Lough Derg wet fen type vegetation occurs in places with Purple Moor-grass, Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Jointed Rush and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*). There is also some Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) and Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*).

Where banks are steeper, particularly around Lough Derg and along the deep mountain valley of the upper stretches, dry, steep slopes support Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Heather, Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). There are areas of scrub surrounding parts of the lake margins, along the channels and on the ungrazed islands. These are composed of Alder, willows, Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*). Understorey plants include abundant ferns and mosses. The rare Narrow-leaved Helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*) occurs on the shores of Lough Derg. This species is listed in the Irish Red Data Book and is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2022.

Small pockets of conifer plantation, close to the lakes and along the strip both sides of the rivers, are included in the site.

Lough Finn holds a population of Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*). This fish is a relative of salmon and trout, and represents an arctic-alpine element in the Irish fauna. In Ireland this fish occurs only in a few cold, stony, oligotrophic lakes. It is listed in the Irish Red Data Book as threatened. The Arctic Char in Lough Finn are unusual in that they are dwarfed. These only occur in one other lake in Ireland, Lough Coornasahom, Co. Kerry and they are therefore of national importance.

Arctic Char are very sensitive to water quality and therefore changes in the catchment such as afforestation should be avoided to maintain this population. Lough Derg is also important for Arctic Char, though the species was last recorded there in 1990/91.

The Finn system is one of Ireland's premier salmon waters. Although the Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) is still fished commercially in Ireland, it is considered to be endangered or locally threatened elsewhere in Europe and is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Commercial netting on the Foyle does not begin until June and this gives spring fish a good opportunity to get into the Finn. The Finn is important in an international context in that its populations of spring salmon appear to be stable, while they are declining in many areas of Ireland and Europe. The salmon fishing season is 1st March to 15th September. Fishing for spring salmon is best east of Stranolar while the grilse run through to the upper reaches. The grilse run peaks here, depending on water, usually in mid-June. The estimated rod catch from the Finn is approximately 500-800 spring salmon and 4,000 grilse annually, producing about 40% of the total Foyle count. The Loughs Agency has a management regime in place called the 'control of fishing regulations'. If enough salmon are not past the counter at Killygordon at a certain key date then both the angling and commercial fishing can be closed for set periods.

The site is also important for Otter (*Lutra lutra*), another species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is widespread throughout the system. In addition, the site also supports many more of the mammal species occurring in Ireland. Those which are listed in the Irish Red Data Book include the Badger (*Meles meles*) and the Irish Hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*). Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*), another Red Data Book species, also occurs within the site.

Golden Plover, Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) and Merlin, threatened species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, breed in the upland areas of the site. The Red Listed species Red Grouse occurs on the site, while the scarce Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*), another Red List species, is also known to occur.

The site supports important populations of a number of species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and several habitats listed on Annex I of this Directive, as well as examples of other important habitats. Blanket bog is a rare habitat type in Europe and receives priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The overall diversity and ecological value of the site is increased by the presence of populations of several rare or threatened birds, mammals, fish and plants.

1.5 Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park SAC

The description of the Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park SAC is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2017c) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2013b) the for the site. Priority habitats are highlighted with an asterisk '*'.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*)
- [3260] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculon fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation
- [4010] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
- [4030] European dry heaths
- [4060] Alpine and Boreal heaths
- [6410] *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*)
- [7130] Blanket bogs (* if active bog)
- [7150] Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
- [91A0] Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles
- [1029] Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)
- [1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- [1421] Killarney Fern (*Vandenboschia speciosa*)

Site Overview

Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park SAC is an exceptionally large inland site located in the centre of north-west Donegal. It includes a rich diversity of habitats and landscape features, including mountains, exposed rock and scree, blanket bogs, dry, wet and alpine heath, upland grassland, wet grassland, rivers, lakes, scrub and woodland. The Gweebarra fault bisects the area forming a long valley, orientated north-east to south-west, in which Lough Barra and Lough Veagh

(Beagh) are situated. The area is generally mountainous, taking in most of the Derryveagh and Glendowan ranges and including the two highest mountains in Donegal, Errigal (751 m) and Slieve Snaght (678 m). Towards the centre-west of the site are the fine ice-carved cliffs of the Poisoned Glen and Bingorms, which contrast dramatically with the gently undulating expanses of blanket bog in the south-west and north-east of the site. The underlying rock is predominantly granite, with a few intrusive dykes. However, around Errigal the geology is more complex with bands of schists, quartzite, granodiorite and limestone occurring.

Atlantic blanket bog is the dominant habitat of interest, with much of it being relatively unspoilt. Indeed, the area around Cloghernagore constitutes the most extensive blanket bog system remaining in the north-west of Ireland. Overall, there are excellent examples of several types of blanket bog including Highland Bog (Cashelnagor and Dunlewy Far), Lowland Bog (Cloghernagore and Glenveagh Bridge), Domed Valley Bog (Derrybeg and Calabber Valley), Headwater Bog (Crockastoller and Carrickatimpan Mountain) and blanket bog apparently in the early stages of formation (Attinadague).

The blanket bog vegetation is relatively uniform and typically dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), with areas of Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) also occurring.

A number of features indicative of well-developed blanket bog are found at the site. The pool systems found are typically colonised by bog moss species such as *Sphagnum auriculatum* and *S. cuspidatum*, Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*)

and sedges (e.g. *Carex panicea* and *C. limosa*), with Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) occurring around the margins. Hummocks of *Sphagnum* species (including *S. capillifolium*, *S. imbricatum* and *S. papillosum*) and other mosses such as *Leucobryum glaucum* and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are found, as are flushed areas with *Sphagnum* species such as *S. auriculatum* var. *inundatum* and *S. magellanicum*, Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), rushes (*Juncus acutiflorus* and *J. effusus*) or sedges (*Carex echinata*, *C. rostrata* and *C. demissa*). There are also quaking flats of mosses (*Campylopus atrovirens*, *C. brevipilus*, *Pleurozia purpurea* and *Sphagnum* spp.) with sedges (e.g. *Carex lasiocarpa*), and shallow, infilling lakes with associated *Sphagnum* scrubs and sedge swards. The vegetation described for the pool areas and wet quaking flats is representative of *Rhynchosporion* vegetation.

A number of scarce or only locally-occurring vascular plant species have been recorded from bogs on the site. These include a hybrid Sundew, *Drosera anglica* x *D. rotundifolia* (*Drosera* x *obovata*), Whorled Caraway (*Carum verticillatum*), Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and, in a gorge, Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*). Lower plants of note include several mosses (*Sphagnum fuscum*, *S. contortum*, *S. recurvum* var. *tenuis*, *S. molle*, *Calliergon stramineum* and *Polytrichum longisetum*) and lichens (*Cladonia parasitica*, *C. gracilis*, *C. bellidiflora*, *C. cervicornis* subsp. *verticillata*, *C. digitata*, *Peltigera hymenaea*, *Sphaerophorus fragilis*, *Usnea fragilesceus* and *Umbilicaria polyrrhiza*). Wet heath occurs at this site in an intimate mosaic with blanket bog, and the vegetation of the two habitat types intergrades. This occurs particularly on the lower slopes of hills, where deep lowland blanket peat meets shallower peat on the flanks of hills. Dry heath occurs at this site on slopes above 300 m. Heather and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) are common, while species such as Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Western Gorse (*U. gallii*) are thought to be relatively uncommon. Other species present include Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Velvet Bent (*A. canina*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*).

Subalpine heath is found at this site on very thin, peaty soils with some bare rock evident. The community is typically dominated by Heather and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) is also found on some of the higher mountain slopes. Other species of note in this habitat are Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*. Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and Bearberry are occasional on mountain summits.

The site includes many rivers and streams, containing, or fringed by plants such as Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), pondweeds (*Potamogeton natans*, *P. polygonifolius*), sedges (*Carex* spp.) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.). By one river the locally-occurring Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) is found. In some areas gorges have been cut by streams, and here fragments of deciduous woodland remain. These are characterised by Aspen (*Populus tremula*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), oak (*Quercus petraea* and *Q. robur*) and willow (*Salix* spp.).

An area of semi-natural deciduous woodland occurs on the steeply sloping eastern side of Glenveagh. The dominant trees are Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rowan, with Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) occurring frequently. Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) occurs in the understorey. Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) has invaded much of the woodland and adjacent hillsides. Other species present include Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Juniper and, near Lough Veagh, the scarce Rock Whitebeam (*Sorbus rupicola*). Within the woodland the lower plant community is well-developed with liverworts, including *Frullania tamarisci*, growing on the tree trunks. This is replaced as an epiphyte in damper areas by Wilson's Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum wilsonii*). Of particular note is the presence of the scarcer Tonbridge Filmy-fern (*H. tunbrigense*). The woodlands are also notable for the presence of two rare species of Myxomycete fungus, namely *Licea gloeoderma* and *Physarum verum*, the former in its only known Irish site.

Molinia meadow at the site is characterised by a co-dominance of Purple Moor-grass, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*J. acutiflorus*) and Conglomerate Rush (*J. conglomeratus*). The habitat occurs in areas that are subject to occasional flooding. Other species recorded include Water Horsetail, Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) and Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*). There are several large oligotrophic lakes on the site, including Lough Barra, Lough Veagh and Lough Altan. Aquatic plant species found include Water Lobelia (*Lobelia*

dortmanna), Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*). Lough Veagh also contains two quillwort species (*Isoetes lacustris* and *I. echinospora*), the latter of which is a locally-occurring species. Some of the smaller lakes also contain the scarce species Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*).

Many scarce plants have been recorded from cliffs and gullies, mainly around Slieve Snaght and the Poisoned Glen. These include Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Alpine Clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*), Stiff Sedge (*Carex bigelowii*), Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*) and Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*). Purple Saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*) and Alpine Saw-wort (*Saussurea alpina*) have also been recorded from this area, along with a more recent sighting of Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*). These are all rare species which are listed in the Irish Red Data Book, the latter also being legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2022, and listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Three other rare Red Data Book plant species have been recorded within the site: Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*), Small-white Orchid (*Pseudorchis albida*) and Heath Cudweed (*Omalothea sylvatica*). The two last-named are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2022.

The area is also of considerable zoological value. Mammal interest includes the largest herd of Red Deer in Ireland, along with Badgers, Otters, Irish Hares and Stoats.

Lough Veagh contains Arctic Char, a fish species that was once widespread but is now rare in most places. It is listed as vulnerable in the Irish Red Data Book. The Owencarrow and Lackagh River systems support a good population of Atlantic Salmon, a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Brown Trout also occur. Common Lizard has been recorded from the site. The site supports populations of Freshwater Pearl Mussel, a rare species that is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

A number of important bird species are represented at this site, with several which are listed in the Red Data Book, and a number listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Those which breed within the area include Red-throated Diver, Golden Plover, Merlin and Peregrine. A small flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose, also listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, feed on some of the bogs in winter. The Red Data Book species Goosander and Wood Warbler both breed on the site. Generally, the woodlands are favoured by Siskin, Tree Creepers and Redstarts, while Meadow Pipits, Red Grouse, Ravens, Snipe and Dunlin are among the birds found on the moorland.

One of the major land uses at this site is conservation management. The site contains the whole of the Glenveagh National Park along with two Statutory Nature Reserves, Lough Barra Bog and Meenachullion Bog. Grazing by sheep and deer is common and in a few places the bogs have suffered from over-grazing and poaching. Grazing has also prevented woodland regeneration. Annual deer culls take place to control numbers and the main herd is kept within the confines of the National Park by a 45 km-long deer fence. Invasion by Rhododendron has been a particular problem within the National Park, where it has choked areas of woodland and covered adjacent hillsides. A removal programme is in progress and the threat from this species has been considerably reduced. Peat cutting, both by hand and machine, has caused damage to some bogs in the site. Turbary and afforestation are the main threats to this habitat, with erosion and burning also having an impact.

The site is of great scientific and conservation value, particularly for the large areas of excellent, little-damaged blanket bog it contains, including the largest intact area of blanket bog in north-west Ireland. It also includes good quality examples of seminatural deciduous woodland, heath, oligotrophic lakes and inland cliffs. The importance of the site is increased by the presence of a wide range of plant and animal species, including many rare or threatened Red Data Book species, and several that are listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive or Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

1.6 River Foyle and Tributaries SAC

The description of the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC is provided here is based on the Site Conservation Objectives (NIEA, 2024).

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [3260] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculus fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation
- [1106] Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Site Overview

The SAC includes the River Foyle and its tributaries i.e. that part of the River Finn which lies within Northern Ireland, the River Mourne and its tributary the River Strule (up to its confluence with the Owenkillew River) and the River Derg, along with two of its sub-tributaries, the Mourne Beg River and the Glendergan River. In total, the area encompasses 120km of watercourse and is notable for the physical diversity and naturalness of the banks and channels, especially in the upper reaches, and the richness and naturalness of its plant and animal communities. Of particular importance is the population of Atlantic Salmon, which is one of the largest in Europe. Research has indicated that each sub-catchment within the system supports genetically distinct populations.

The area is also important as a river habitat. In their upper catchments, the rivers are all fast-flowing spate rivers with dynamic flow regimes characterised by sequences of rapid, riffle and run. Although the banks may have been modified in the past, the channels are natural and composed of large cobble substrate with scattered boulders and sandy marginal deposits, while cobble side and point bars and discrete sand deposits are common features. At the top end of the River Derg and its two tributaries, the aquatic flora reflect the highly acidic character of the water, with mosses and liverworts dominant. Beds of Stream Water Crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* var. *penicillatus* occur where the flow is less dynamic.

The River Foyle below Strabane is slow-flowing and is influenced by a tidal regime, rising and falling with the tidal cycle. Aquatic plants in the channel are extremely limited, particularly in the more saline areas; here, fucoids make up the main component.

Otter is found throughout the system. A small population of the now rare Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) was still present in the Mourne River in the mid-nineties.

1.7 Donegal Bay SPA

The description of the Donegal Bay SPA is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2012c) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2010e) for the site.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [A003] Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*)
- [A046] Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*)
- [A065] Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)
- [A144] Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)
- [A999] Wetlands and Waterbirds

Site Overview

Donegal Bay SPA is a very large, marine-dominated, site. It extends from Doorin Point to the west of Donegal Town, to Tullaghan Point in County Leitrim, a distance of approximately 15km along its north-east/south-west axis. It varies in width from about 3km to over 8km. The site includes the estuary of the River Eske, which flows through Donegal Town, and the estuary of the River Erne, which flows through Ballyshannon. Much of the shoreline is rocky or stony, with well-developed littoral reefs in places. There are also extensive stretches of sandy beaches, especially from the Murvagh peninsula southwards to Rossnowlagh and at the outer part of the estuary of the River Erne. Shingle or cobble beaches are also represented. There are extensive areas of intertidal flats associated with the estuary of the River Eske, reflecting the very sheltered conditions in this part of the bay. These have been shown to be biotope

rich, and supporting a range of macro-invertebrates, including polychaete worms (*Hediste diversicolor*, *Arenicola marina* and *Nephtys hombergii*) and bivalves (*Scrobicularia plana*, *Cerastoderma edule* and *Macoma balthica*).

Elsewhere, a narrow fringe of intertidal flats is exposed at low tides. Salt marshes are found in the sheltered conditions of the innermost part of the bay. A number of small, grassy, islands occur in the innermost part of the bay. The waters of the shallow bay overlie mostly sandy substrates, though reefs occur in places.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Great Northern Diver, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Common Scoter and Sanderling. 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.

Donegal Bay supports an excellent diversity of wintering waterbirds, especially species associated with shallow bays (all figures are mean peak counts for four of the five winters between 1995/96 and 1999/2000). It has an internationally important wintering population of Great Northern Diver (138) and is consistently one of the top sites in the country for this species. It also has one of the few regular populations of Black-throated Diver in the country (11), and Red-throated Diver (21). It supports an internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (207) and nationally important populations of Common Scoter (860) and Sanderling (68). A range of other species associated with estuarine and shoreline habitats occurs at the site, including Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) (29), Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) (24), Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) (224), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) (100), Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) (14), Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) (38), Oystercatcher (581), Ringed Plover (99), Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) (103), Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) (122), Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) (269), Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) (49), Curlew (359), Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*) (93), Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) (12) and Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) (53). Gulls are regular in autumn and winter, especially Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) (239) and Common Gull (*Larus canus*) (297).

This large coastal site is of high ornithological importance, with two species having populations of international importance (Great Northern Diver and Light-bellied Brent Goose) and a further two species having populations of national importance (Common Scoter and Sanderling). Also of note is that five of the regularly occurring species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Great Northern Diver, Black-throated Diver, Red-throated Diver, Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit.

1.8 Lough Swilly SPA

The description of the Lough Swilly SPA is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2011) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2014c) the for the site.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [A005] Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)
- [A028] Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
- [A038] Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)
- [A043] Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)
- [A048] Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)
- [A052] Teal (*Anas crecca*)
- [A053] Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
- [A062] Scaup (*Aythya marila*)
- [A067] Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)
- [A069] Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

- [A125] Coot (*Fulica atra*)
- [A130] Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)
- [A143] Knot (*Calidris canutus*)
- [A149] Dunlin (*Alpina alpina*)
- [A160] Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)
- [A162] Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
- [A164] Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
- [A179] Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
- [A182] Common Gull (*Larus canus*)
- [A193] Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- [A395] Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*)
- [A855] Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)
- [A857] Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)
- [A863] Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)
- [A999] Wetlands and Waterbirds

Site Overview

Lough Swilly is a long sea inlet cut through a variety of metamorphic rocks, situated on the west side of the Inishowen Peninsula in north Co. Donegal. The SPA comprises the inner part of Lough Swilly from just east of Letterkenny northwards to Killygarvan (c. 2km north of Rathmullan) on the west side and to c. 2km south of Buncrana on the east side; it includes the adjacent Inch Lough. Also forming part of the site is a series of improved pasture and arable fields on the south side of Lough Swilly between Farsetmore and Inch Levels – these are of importance to geese and swans. It includes sections of the estuaries of the River Swilly, the River Leannan and the Isle Burn and the predominant habitat is a series of extensive sand and mud flats which are exposed at low tide - both estuaries and sand/mud flats are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Other habitats represented in the site are salt marshes, lagoons (at Inch Lough and Blanket Nook), rivers and streams, sand and shingle beaches, lowland wet and dry grasslands, drainage ditches, reedbeds and scrub. Inch Lough, whilst artificial in origin, is one of the largest and best examples of a shallow, low salinity lagoon in the country; it supports what is probably the largest population in the country of the Red-listed charophyte *Chara canescens*. A small sandy island, used by nesting terns, swans and gulls, occurs in the southern part of the lagoon.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Whooper Swan, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Scaup, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Coot, Oystercatcher, Knot, Dunlin, Curlew, Redshank, Greenshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Sandwich Tern and Common Tern. The site 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 site supports an excellent diversity of waterfowl species in autumn and winter as well as breeding terns, gulls and ducks. The shallow waters provide suitable habitat for grebes and diving duck, while the intertidal flats are used by an abundance of wildfowl and waders. At high tide, the duck and wader species roost on the salt marshes and shorelines, with some species moving to the adjacent pasture and arable fields. The combination within this site of extensive feeding areas and safe resting and roosting sites makes this one of the most important wetlands in the north-west of the country for wintering waterfowl.

Lough Swilly SPA supports internationally important numbers of Whooper Swan (1,673 - mean peak for the five winters 1995/96-1999/2000), Greenland White-fronted Goose (847 for the

Lough Swilly flock - mean peak for the five winters 1994/95-1998/99) and Greylag Goose (1,218 - mean peak for the five winters 1995/96-1999/2000). The main areas of the site used by these species are at Big Isle, Farsetmore, Blanket Nook, Ballylawn and Inch Levels. The flock sizes for Whooper Swan and Greylag Goose are the highest in the country. Considerably higher numbers of Whooper Swan (peak of 1,946) have been recorded, especially early in the season, as this is the area where the swans make their Irish landfall in autumn on their return from breeding grounds in Iceland. Both Greenland White-fronted Goose and Whooper Swan are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

The site includes nationally important populations of 18 wintering waterbird species as follows (all figures are mean peaks for the five winters 1995/96-1999/00): Great Crested Grebe (284), Grey Heron (57), Shelduck (772), Wigeon (1,580), Teal (1,581), Mallard (1,169), Shoveler (60), Scaup (103), Goldeneye (170), Red-breasted Merganser (127), Coot (514), Oystercatcher (1,595), Knot (303), Dunlin (7,285), Curlew (1,720), Redshank (1,404), Greenshank (48) and Common Gull (1,523). Other species which occur include Light-bellied Brent Goose (152), Pochard (102), Golden Plover (749), Lapwing (1,408), Ringed Plover (81), Grey Plover (15), Bar-tailed Godwit (139) and Turnstone (73). The site is an important area for Great Northern Diver (19) and the rare Slavonian Grebe (11). The rare winter visitor, Pink-footed Goose, also occurs (15). Nationally important numbers of Mute Swan (265) also use the site.

The small island in Inch Lough supports the largest tern colony in the north-west, with nationally important populations of Sandwich Tern (258 pairs in 2001) and Common Tern (89 pairs in 2001) occurring. These two species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. There is also a nationally important colony of Black-headed Gull (800 pairs in 2001), which represents one of the largest populations in the country.

Several species of duck breed on Inch Lough, most notably Tufted Duck, with an estimate of between 100 and 200 pairs occurring in 1997. Mute Swan breeds in important numbers and a concentration of 50 pairs on the small island in Inch Lough is most unusual as this species seldom nests in colonies. Whooper Swan, a very rare breeding species in Ireland, has been recorded nesting at Inch Lough. Lapwing breeds in regionally important numbers either on wet grass fields within the levels or around the edge of the lagoon. Coot also breed (estimate of 50 pairs in the 1990s).

Lough Swilly SPA is of major ornithological importance for wintering waterbirds, with three species occurring in numbers of international importance and 18 occurring regularly in numbers of national importance. The site is regularly used by more than 20,000 waterfowl and as such is of international importance. Additionally, it holds nationally important breeding populations of three species, i.e. Sandwich Tern, Common Tern and Black-headed Gull. The site is used by a good range of species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of Lough Swilly SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.

1.9 Lough Nillan Bog SPA

The description of the Lough Nillan Bog SPA is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2025c) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2010c) the for the site.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

- [A098] Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)
- [A140] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)
- [A395] Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*)
- [A466] Dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*)

Site Overview

Lough Nillan Bog SPA covers a large area of the hills immediately south of Glenties in Co. Donegal. The site extends from Owenea Lough in the west to the summit of Silver Hill in the east. Most of the area is underlain by dark, metamorphic siltstones but a few igneous intrusions also occur. The site comprises an extensive complex of blanket bog, wet heath,

lakes, rivers and streams, with the topography varying from level plains to steep hills. The bog has a range of micro-topographical features (e.g. hummocks, inter-connecting pools and flushes) and vegetation communities.

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, Merlin, Golden Plover and Dunlin.

The site provides one of only two known bogland feeding areas used by the Sheskinmore Lough Greenland White-fronted Goose flock. Despite a decline in the size of this flock since the 1980s significant numbers of birds still visit the site (53 - peak count in 1999/2000).

The site supports an excellent range of bird species typical of peatland habitats. It has one of the largest known concentrations of breeding Golden Plover in the country – a survey in 2002 recorded 16 nesting pairs. Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*) also breeds at the site (6 pairs recorded in 2002). Furthermore, the site provides valuable foraging habitat for up to five pairs of Merlin which are known to have territories in the vicinity. Other species utilising the site include Red-throated Diver and Red Grouse.

Lough Nillan Bog SPA is of high ornithological importance, with nationally important populations of breeding Merlin, Golden Plover and Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*). Whilst the size of the Greenland White-fronted Goose flock has declined, the site is still of significance as it is one of the few traditional bog sites in the region that is still used by the species. The occurrence of Greenland White-fronted Goose, Merlin, Golden Plover, Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*) and Red-throated Diver, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is of particular note.

1.10 Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA

The description of the Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2025b) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2012b) the for the site.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[A395] Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*)

Site Overview

Located to the west of Lough Derg in Co. Donegal, this site comprises an extensive complex of blanket bog, wet heath, lakes and pools in an area of low hills and broad basins. The bog is mostly undisturbed and has a good range of vegetation communities and microtopographical features, e.g. hummocks, inter-connecting pools and flushes. The principal lakes within the site are the Dunragh Loughs, Lough Barderg and the eastern half of Lough Golagh. The site is bounded by extensive conifer plantations to the east and south, with further bog to the north and west. The area is underlain by metamorphic gneiss and schist.

At the time this site was designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) it was being utilised by a Greenland White-fronted Goose population. In the 1980s, the Greenland White-fronted Goose flock utilising this site largely deserted the bogs in favour of coastal grassland sites, e.g. Durnesh Lough SPA. Greenland White-fronted Goose still occurs within this site and it is one of the few places where this species continues to utilise peatland habitats. Greenland White-fronted Goose is regarded as a special conservation interest for this SPA.

Both Merlin and Hen Harrier have been recorded nesting in the vicinity of the site and may forage within it. Much of the site is designated a Statutory Nature Reserve and a Biogenetic Reserve, and is also listed under the Ramsar Convention.

1.11 Lough Derg (Donegal) SPA

The description of the Lough Derg (Donegal) SPA is provided here is based on the Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2025a) and Site Synopsis (NPWS, 2012a) the for the site.

Qualifying Interests of the Site

[A183] Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

[A184] Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Site Overview

Lough Derg is a large, oligotrophic lake situated north of Pettigo, Co. Donegal. The lake lies in a landscape of extensive blanket bogs and conifer plantations which make up its catchment. The underlying geology of the area is acid gneiss with some basic intrusions.

The lakeshore is mainly stony, and marginal vegetation is poorly developed due to the close proximity of the conifer plantations. The lake has a number of islands. The lakeshore has a sparse covering of Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*) and the moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*. Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) are found on the margins. There are areas of scrub along parts of the lake shores and on the ungrazed islands. These are composed of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willow (*Salix* spp.), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and birch (*Betula* sp.).

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull.

A large colony of nesting gulls was discovered on Inishgoosk Island in 1977. A survey in 1999 estimated a population of 500 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull, which is the largest colony in the country. An estimated 100 pairs of Herring Gull were also present, which is of national importance. Common Gull has bred here in the past.

The Pettigo Plateau Greenland White-fronted Goose flock formerly used Lough Derg as a feeding and/or roost site. Inishgoosk Island appeared to be the main feeding area used. In the 1980s, the bogs were largely deserted in favour of coastal grassland sites at Durnesh Lough and Brownhall. Wintering waterfowl are scarce on Lough Derg due to the oligotrophic character of the system but small numbers of Tufted Duck, Mallard and Goldeneye occur. A feral Greylag Goose flock is resident at the site.

Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), a threatened Red Data Book species, was recorded from the lake as recently 1990/91.

Lough Derg SPA is of national importance for both Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull. In the past it was used by Greenland White-fronted Goose, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive