

Country: Ireland

Ref: 7IE042

Name of wetland: Lough Iron

Lough Iron is a long narrow midland lake, some 250 hectares in size. It is located 12 km north-west of Mullingar and is surrounded by intensively farmed agricultural land. Drainage of the river Inny in the 1960's has led to a drastic drop in the level of the lake and this in turn has led to the development of freshwater marsh and wet grassland on what was previously lake bed. The dominant marsh species are Canary Reed Grass (*Phalaris acuminata*) and Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*), the latter species forming large expanses of wet grassland. There are also patches of calcareous fen, wet woodland dominated by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and tall sedge fen dominated by Tufted Sedge (*Carex elata*) and Bottle Sedge (*Crex rostrata*). Quite a wide band of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) fringes the lake. Large areas of fringing freshwater marsh have been badly damaged by the planting of conifers. This has occurred along the western edge of the lake.

Despite the spread of fringing marsh and forestry the lake is one of the most important wildfowl sites in the midlands. In addition to supporting large numbers of snipe and duck there are internationally important numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese and Whooper Swans present during winter. The Greenland White-front's use pastures surrounding the lake as feeding grounds. The marsh areas contain quite a few rare plant species including Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*), a Duckweed (*Lemma polyrrhiza*) and Marsh Pea (*Lathyrus palustris*). The latter species was legally protected under

In conclusion Lough Iron is a lake with great ornithological and botanical interest and this combination of interests is unmatched in other large midland lakes.