

71E044

## Lough Gara

Lough Gara is situated approximately 7km west of Boyle at its northern end and approximately 7km north-east of Ballaghaderreen at its southern margin. The site has an average altitude of 68m above sea-level. The greater part of the site lies in County Sligo, but the southern and parts of the south-eastern shores are in County Roscommon. It is a shallow (maximum depth 16m), medium sized (1,100ha) limestone lake; to the south, it is fed by the Lung and Breedoge rivers, while in the north, it strains into the River Shannon via the Boyle River. The shoreline is convoluted and has receded substantially from its original level due to various drainage schemes since the mid 19th century. The site encompasses some low-lying islands, and Callow Bog to the south-west.

The vegetation of the site has been rendered more diverse by drainage. The shallower lake margins and small bogs have extensive swamps dominated by common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and bottle sedge (*Carex rostrata*) with occasional bullrush (*Typha latifolia*). Amid the southernmost part of the lake, clumps of common club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) are particularly abundant.

The old lake shore is usually clearly visible, below which a sedge-rich marsh occurs and includes black bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), water mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), creeping-bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and wild angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) with willow (*Salix* spp.), occasionally colonising some areas.

The upper part of the shore and adjoining abandoned fields are frequently colonised by scrub which includes willow, alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). In parts, small stands of birch (*Betula pubescens*) woodland occur interspersed with holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and oak (*Quercus* spp.).

Bogland vegetation is typified by ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), bog asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), bog cotton (*Eriophorum* spp.) and purple moor-grass (*Molinia cerulea*).

The adjoining peatland of Callow Bog is of importance as it's type (a western raised bog) is large and relatively intact.

Lough Gara is of international importance due to the numbers of Greenland white-fronted geese (540) which overwinter at the site (three year mean to 1990/91). Other species include mute swan (24), whooper swan (71), wigeon (601), teal (419), mallard (243), tufted duck (77), lapwing (190), curlew (73) - (one count, 1984/85 - 1986/87). Lough Gara is internationally important for Greenland white-fronted geese colonies. Callow Bog is of national importance in terms of the peatland type, its size and quality. Drainage of the lake catchment, low intensity farming and abandoned homesteads have served to increase the overall habitat diversity and generally result in a semi-natural habitat encompassing much of the current lake.