

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYALLIA LAKE WILDFOWL SANCTUARY SPA

SITE CODE: 004041

Ballyallia Lake is a relatively small, naturally eutrophic, lake set in Carboniferous limestone. The site is located on the River Fergus, a little north of Ennis town, Co. Clare. It is a shallow system but can rise substantially during winter floods. Habitat and species diversity around the lake is fairly low and only a few emergent plants are found, such as Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). A low-lying flood plain of wet grassland and rough pasture grazing land to the west is included within the site. Substantial areas of improved grassland, used by feeding waterfowl, are also included. Intensively farmed land occurs to the north and south. The lake is used for a range of recreational activities.

The site supports a good diversity of wintering waterfowl, including swans, dabbling duck, diving duck and some waders. Seven of the species have populations of national importance (all figures given are average peaks for 4 of the 5 winters between 1995/96-1999/00): Little Grebe (37), Wigeon (1,469), Gadwall (68), Teal (863), Shoveler (288), Coot (331) and Black-tailed Godwit (278). Other species which occur include Whooper Swan (76), Mallard (502), Pintail (18), Pochard (33), Tufted Duck (153), Lapwing (930), Mute Swan (28), Grey Heron (11), Cormorant (13), Greylag Goose (9) and Black-headed Gull (443). The Shoveler population is the largest in the country (9.6% of the national total), while that of Gadwall is also very notable (3.4% of total).

The quality of the habitat for the birds is good and the site provides both feeding and roost sites for them. Some of the birds, however, and especially Black-tailed Godwit, commute to the nearby River Fergus-River Shannon estuary.

The site is a Wildfowl Sanctuary and there are no imminent significant threats to the wintering bird populations. However, the site is a popular recreational area and an increase in such activities could cause significant disturbance. Agricultural intensification within the site could have detrimental effects for some species, while intensification outside of the site could affect water quality.

This is an important site for wintering waterfowl, having seven species with populations of national importance, those of Shoveler and Gadwall being of especial note. Also of importance is the occurrence of Whooper Swan, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.