

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BLACKWATER CALLOWS SPA

SITE CODE: 004094

This site comprises the stretch of the River Blackwater that runs in a west to east direction between Fermoy and Lismore, a distance of almost 25 km. The site includes the river channel and strips of seasonally-flooded grassland within the flood plain. Sandstone ridges parallel to the river confine the area of flooding to a relatively narrow corridor. The lower stretch, from Ballyduff to Lismore, is more subject to flooding than the upper part.

The river channel has a well-developed aquatic plant community, which includes such species as Pond Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus peltatus*), Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus* spp.), Canadian Pondweed (*Elodea canadensis*), pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.), water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum* spp.) and water-starwort (*Callitriche* spp.). Emergent swamp vegetation, comprised of species such as Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*), occurs in places. Marshes are present in some areas adjacent to the river and includes species such as Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*), amongst others. The grassland adjacent to the river of the site is mostly improved, though substantial areas are still liable to flooding. The grassland most prone to flooding is characterised by such species as Yellow-flag (*Iris pseudacorus*), Meadow-sweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.). Wet woodland, comprised mostly of willows (*Salix* spp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), fringe the river in places, whilst oakwoods occur in a few locations above the floodplain (mostly outside of the site).

The site is of high ornithological interest on account of the populations of wintering waterfowl that use it. Whooper Swan occurs in numbers of international importance (170) - all figures are average peaks for the 5 seasons 1995/96-99/00. Bewick's Swan was regular at the site in significant numbers up to the mid 1990s. However, only four birds were recorded in the winter of 1997/98 and two in the winter of 1998/99, and the species is no longer considered to be a regular visitor. This decline is in line with a national decrease in numbers and a marked contraction in range. The site supports a large population of Wigeon (2,313), as well as Teal (898), Mallard (398) and Shoveler (26). The Wigeon and Teal populations are of national importance. The callow grasslands are particularly suited to Black-tailed Godwit (251), a nationally important population that on occasions exceeds the threshold for international importance. Other waders that occur regularly are Lapwing (221) and Curlew (534). Black-headed Gull (323) is a feature of the site during winter. The birds feed mainly on the areas of grassland, the majority of which are improved, that flood seasonally. Some feeding also occurs outside of the site, while birds also leave the site to avail of suitable roosts.



Little Egret is a feature of the site throughout the year as there is a breeding colony downstream. The river system provides an important feeding area for these birds.

The River Blackwater is a noted salmonid fishery, and the river also has Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*), Brook Lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*), River Lamprey (*L. fluviatilis*) and Twaite Shad (*Alosa fallax fallax*). Otter is frequent throughout the site.

While water quality in the system is mostly good there are localised stretches which have been polluted from agricultural run-off and from point sources. Pollution remains a general threat to water quality within site.

This site is of importance for its populations of wintering waterfowl, including an internationally important population of Whooper Swan and nationally important populations of Wigeon, Teal and Black-tailed Godwit. The presence of Whooper Swan, as well as Little Egret, is of particular note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

For inspection purposes only.
Consent of copyright owner required for any other use.