



Turloughs of County Roscommon



County Roscommon

Roscommon is an inland county covering an area of approximately 2,500 square kilometres. The landscape is generally flat with gentle rolling hills. Only in some northern parts of the county does the land rise above 250m with the highest point 400m, on the County Leitrim border

Most of the county is underlain with Carboniferous Limestone. There are a few pockets of sandstone, in the north, west and east of the county.

The River Suck lies to the west and south of the county, while the mighty River Shannon and Lough Ree flow along the eastern border. There are a number of large lakes scattered throughout the county.

Wildlife of Turloughs

Turloughs are noted for waterbirds particularly in winter when large numbers can occur. In summer when the water levels are low wildflowers grow in abundance. Wildflowers attract insects that in turn attract summer birds.

Wintering Wildbirds

In winter the flooded turloughs in County Roscommon attract a large variety of wildfowl. The turloughs are important winter feeding areas for a large number of birds. Species include swans, ducks, waders and geese.

Swans

Three species of swan spend the winter months at some turloughs in County Roscommon.

The mute swan is resident in Ireland throughout the year and is distinguished by an orange coloured bill. The other two swans, the whooper and the bewick's swan are winter visitors and both have a yellow and black bill.

The whooper swan arrives in autumn from Iceland while the bewick's swan comes from northern Russia and Siberia. Both species winter in flocks with a greater number of whooper swans than bewick's swan.

Only the mute swans stay for the summer.



Bewick's Swan



Mute Swan



Whooper Swan

Waders of Turloughs

Large flocks of waders including golden plover, lapwing, curlew and redshank spend the winter at many turloughs in County Roscommon. Some birds are native but many more arrive in autumn from northern Europe, Siberia and Iceland.



Lapwing



Golden Plover



Curlew

Wintering Ducks

Dabbling ducks prefer shallow water and most turloughs are shallow and ideal.

Species of duck that have been recorded on turloughs in County Roscommon include gadwall, mallard, pintail, shoveler, teal and wigeon.

Golden-eye, pochard and tufted duck may be seen diving in the deeper depths at the centre of turloughs.

White-fronted Goose

About half the world's population of the greenland white-fronted goose arrive in Ireland each autumn. A small number winter in County Roscommon at turloughs.

White-fronted Goose



Castleplunkett Turlough

Turloughs in County Roscommon

Most of the major turloughs in County Roscommon are located in mid and south Roscommon from the area around Strokestown in the north to Mount Talbot in the south.

Size of Turloughs

Turloughs vary in size but most cover an area of many hectares. Most turloughs rise to a depth of around two metres or so but some turloughs can be up to five metres deep.



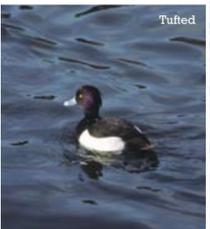
Pochard



Wigeon



Teal



Tufted

Special plants at Turloughs

Some species of wild plant are special, growing only at turloughs. In County Roscommon the species recorded include turlough violet, turlough black moss and a rare species of dandelion.



Turlough Violet

Turlough Moss

The highest flood level at turloughs is frequently marked by the presence of the black moss *Cinclidotus fontinaloides* covering rocks, walls or tree branches. The moss only grows at the upper boundary of turloughs and lakes.



Black Moss on rocks

Wild flowers of Turloughs

In summer the turloughs disappear leaving a pasture with grasses, sedges and wildflowers. The damp habitat is ideal for wildflower like grass of parnassus, lady's smock, brooklime, ragged robin and buttercup.



Buttercup

Turloughs of County Roscommon



Mullygollan in Winter



Brierfield in Summer



Grass of Parnassus



Mallard



Orange Tip Butterfly

Some Turloughs in County Roscommon...

- Annaghmore (Strokestown)
- Ballinturly (Athleague)
- Brierfield (Castleplunket)
- Castleplunket Village
- Coolcam (Ballinlough)
- Corbally (Tulsk)
- Four Roads
- Lisduff (Athleague)
- Lough Croan
- Mullygollan (Castleplunket)

Some Turloughs are designated as:
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Special Protection Area (SPA)
Natural Heritage Area (NHA)
under EU or Irish legislation.



What is a Turlough?

The name Turlough appears to come from the Irish Tuar Loch, dry lake. Turloughs are lakes or low lying areas in limestone.

Turloughs fill and empty mainly through a joint in the limestone or a swallow hole connected with the underground water table. Turloughs are not fed or drained by surface streams.

In most years during the wet winter months, turloughs fill with water and in summer generally dry out and disappear. Some turloughs may hold water in their deepest parts in summer and remain small lakes or ponds.

Turloughs are sometimes referred to as temporary lakes or disappearing lakes.



Turlough at Four Roads



Ballinturly Turlough in Summer

Turloughs in Ireland

Turloughs are a feature almost unique to Ireland and are an interesting part of our landscape.

They are principally associated with limestone areas and occur widely in the western counties including Roscommon, Galway, Mayo and Clare. Also, a few occur in Sligo, Longford, Limerick and a scattering of other counties.

They are of interest because of their formation, means of flooding and their flora and fauna.

Turloughs of County Roscommon



Lough Croan



Whooper Swans

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Turlough Wildlife in County Roscommon

Look around you and see the wonderful selection of flowers & wildlife in our beautiful turloughs...

**Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)**

The moorhen is very distinctive with a brightly coloured frontal shield and bill, and a blackish plumage. It feeds in water but can also graze on pastures near water, walking in a hen-like manner.

**Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)**

The mallard is one of the group of surface-feeders or dabbling ducks. The male mallard is boldly marked while the female is brown-speckled for camouflage. The mallard is an extremely common breeding and wintering duck in County Roscommon.

**Mute Swan (*Cygnus oler*)**

The mute swan is resident in Ireland throughout the year. The male (the cob) and the female (the pen) are identical in plumage and both have an orange bill unlike the whooper swan that has a yellow bill.

**Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)**

The lapwing is the most widespread and most distinctive plover species in Ireland. Large numbers spend the winter at turloughs in County Roscommon. The lapwing has a distinctive flapping flight and call.

**Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)**

The curlew is a distinctive wading bird with long legs and a very long bill. Curlews are resident in County Roscommon throughout the year with large flocks gathering at turloughs in winter time.

**Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)**

The whooper swan is a winter visitor from Iceland to turloughs and lakes in County Roscommon. Whooper swans arrive in Ireland in late autumn, and leave by mid-April. The yellow coloured bill distinguishes it from the mute swan.

**Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)**

The tufted duck is a diving duck that feeds on freshwater life from the bottom of turloughs and lakes. Some nest in County Roscommon but many more arrive in autumn from Europe and stay for the winter.

**Teal (*Anas crecca*)**

The teal is the smallest duck species in Ireland and feeds almost entirely at the surface. While some nest in County Roscommon, large flocks arrive in autumn to the turloughs of the county from Europe.

**Orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)**

Only the male orange-tip butterfly sports the orange tips on its wings. The female has black on its wing tips. The orange-tip can be seen flying in April and May mainly wherever the food plant of the caterpillar, lady's smock, grows.

**Hoverfly (order Diptera)**

Hoverflies are very diverse and can be found in a range of habitats including water. Some are brightly coloured and resemble a wasp or a bee for protection. Over one hundred different species of hoverfly have been recorded in Ireland.

**Turlough Violet (*Viola persicifolia*)**

The turlough violet is very rare in Ireland as it only grows in turloughs where grassland is subject to flooding. The pale-blue coloured flowers appear in May and June. In Ireland and County Roscommon this wildflower is very scarce.

**Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)**

The ringlet prefers damp grassland and can be seen in July and August, mainly during strong sunlight. The ringlet looks dull in flight but when it settles and closes its wings the numerous circles can be seen on its wing undersides.

**Golden Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)**

In autumn large numbers of golden plover arrive from Iceland and Europe and spend the winter in Ireland. Large flocks can be seen at turloughs in County Roscommon in winter until early April when they migrate to their breeding areas.

**Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)**

With long, bright-orange red legs and reddish bill the redshank is easily recognised. The redshank is a medium sized wader and can be very noisy when disturbed. Some breed in County Roscommon but many more arrive in winter.

**Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)**

The long straight bill and the striped head make the snipe an easy bird to identify. Snipe are present all year near turloughs. In the breeding season snipe mark out their territory with a peculiar display flight, including a drumming sound from tail feathers.

**Wigeon (*Anas Penelope*)**

Wigeon are surface feeders that form large flocks in winter at turloughs in County Roscommon. Wigeon arrive in autumn from Europe. Wigeon and Teal often form large flocks and feed together.

**Ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*)**

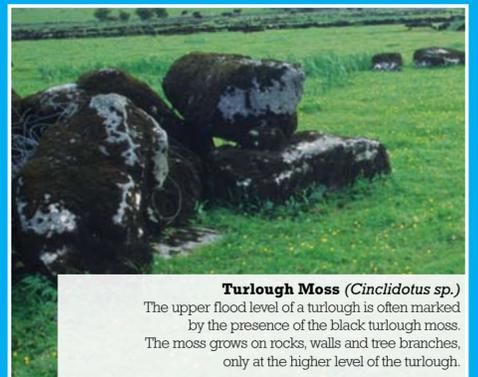
The ragged and jagged red flowers of this wildflower can be seen waving in the breezes of early summer in damp meadows. It is in flower in May and June when the cuckoo is calling, hence the Latin name *flos-cuculi* meaning cuckoo flower.

**Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*)**

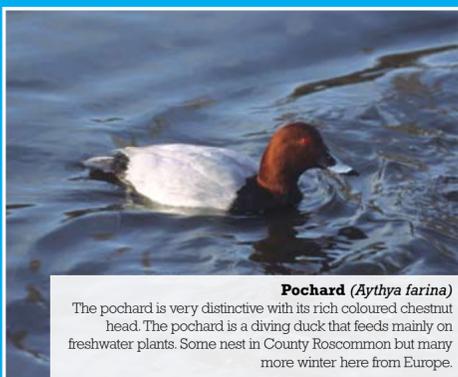
The green-veined white is distinguished from other species of white butterfly by the green vein-like markings on the underside of its wings. The green-veined white butterfly can fly on cloudy days unlike many other butterfly species.

**Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*)**

The lilac coloured flowers of the Lady's smock appear about the same time the cuckoo arrives and disappear about the time the cuckoo has finished singing in June. This is a common wildflower of wet areas in County Roscommon.

**Turlough Moss (*Cinclidotus* sp.)**

The upper flood level of a turlough is often marked by the presence of the black turlough moss. The moss grows on rocks, walls and tree branches, only at the higher level of the turlough.

**Pochard (*Aythya farina*)**

The pochard is very distinctive with its rich coloured chestnut head. The pochard is a diving duck that feeds mainly on freshwater plants. Some nest in County Roscommon but many more winter here from Europe.

**Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)**

The shoveler is a dabbling duck with a distinctive large bill. The large shovel-shaped bill is used to sieve tiny food particles from shallow water and mud. Nesting shoveler are scarce in Ireland but a few breed near turloughs in County Roscommon.

**Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*)**

Brooklime is a low sized wildflower that grows in muddy places, close to freshwater. It is a member of the speedwell family of wildflowers and the dark-blue flowers appear in July and August. It is common in damp places.

**Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)**

Buttercups are a common wildflower in many meadow fields and pastures. There are a few different species but most will grow in damp areas near turloughs. The bright-yellow flowers of buttercups appear from May to August.