

Ireland's Wetland Habitats

Inland

Rivers and canals: linear flowing water-bodies of upland (rivers) and lowland, supporting a range of aquatic plants, invertebrates and fish.

Lakes and ponds: open, permanent water-bodies that support aquatic plants and animals, including fish.

Turlough: a grassy basin or depression in regions of exposed limestone that fills with groundwater annually for up to 6 months and empties in periods of low rainfall, usually in summer.

Marsh: an area, usually in a basin, of water-logged mineral soil in which the water level seldom rises above the surface.

Swamp: a basin normally flooded throughout the year and dominated by tall emergent (emerging above the water) vegetation.

Bog: rain-fed peatland with abundant *Sphagnum* moss, that is permanently wet; bogs include raised bog and upland & lowland blanket bog.

Fen: peat-forming wetland that receives mineral nutrients from groundwater so that it is less acidic than bogs and does not support *Sphagnum*.

Wet Woodland: low-lying, poorly-drained woodland along riversides or lakes where the dominant tree species are generally willow, alder or birch.

Coastal

Marine shores: includes rocky offshore islands, sea cliffs, sand bars, spits and sandy islets and dune systems.

Estuary: the area of a river valley where it meets the sea and deposits mud.

Salt Marsh: area of grassy or shrubby salt tolerant vegetation that is flooded periodically (at least by Mean High Water Spring Tides) by the sea and occurs along sheltered coasts often on mud or sand.

Lagoon: lake or pond of brackish (partially saline) water fully or partially separated from the sea by sandbanks or shingle.

Threats to wetlands in Ireland

- Drainage of wetlands for water extraction, agricultural, peat extraction and private afforestation.
- Building development on wetlands – road building and housing development, resulting in loss of habitats for all wildlife; flooding may still occur on this developed land.
- Infilling for agricultural land reclamation.
- Pollution including sewage, chemical waste and run-off from industry and agriculture into surface and groundwater.
- Invasive species including Japanese knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam, American Mink and Zebra Mussels.

World Wetlands Day
2nd February - every year!

See www.irishwetlands.ie for details



Photo: Deirdre Burns

Ireland's Wetlands

Approximately one-quarter of the total area of Ireland is water, comprising a broad diversity of wetlands. Our coastal wetlands include all marine waters off-shore to a depth of 6 metres, including significant estuaries such as the Shannon Estuary, but also broad stretches of open coastline. With its ample rainfall supply, the island hosts a broad diversity of freshwater wetlands such as marshes, fens, bogs, rivers, lakes and ponds. Our rivers and streams link these wetlands with the sea and act as corridors for our migratory fish species – the salmon, eels, lampreys and shads. Some, such as our peatlands and turloughs, are uniquely different to others in the world.

Ireland's wetlands are a vital component of the water cycle, acting as sponges, retaining large quantities of water during periods of high rainfall and slowly releasing this in drier times.

They fulfill many important functions and provide important ecological services such as:

- Water purification, naturally filtering removing high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus from water;
- Flood control, by absorbing excess water and preventing surges that damage land and property;
- Climate change mitigation by acting as carbon sinks;
- Biodiversity refuges, providing a great wealth of specialist habitats, plants and animals;
- Scenic landscapes, these are prime locations for recreation and tourism;
- Educational tools for learning about environmental and ecological issues;
- Food provision (shellfish, fish).



Red Shank Photo: Clive Timmons



Marsh Frithillary Euphydryas Aurinia Photo: Robert Thompson



Emperor Dragonfly Photo: Eddie Dunne

Ramsar Convention (www.ramsar.org)

The Ramsar Convention is a global intergovernmental treaty that encourages its member countries, including Ireland to maintain the ecological character of their wetlands of international importance. The total global area of designated sites is over 200 Million hectares, which include 67,000 hectares for the 45 sites in Ireland.

The Dept of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, as the competent authority for the Ramsar Convention in Ireland is working to actively to support the three pillars of the Convention:

1. **Wise use of wetlands:** to ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands it has designated as Wetlands of International Importance and including as far as possible the wise use of all wetlands in national environmental planning.
2. **Listed sites:** to designate at least one wetland site at the time of accession and promote its conservation and to continue to designate suitable wetlands within its territory.
3. **International cooperation:** to consult with other Parties about implementation of the Convention, especially in regard to transboundary wetlands, shared water systems, and shared species.

Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee (IRWC)

The Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee was established in 2010. This national committee comprises members drawn from a variety of relevant government agencies, scientific and technical institutions, regional and local authorities and non-governmental organisations.

It's principal objective is to promote the wise use and protection of all wetlands in Ireland. More specifically the IRWC aims to:

- Raise the public profile of all wetlands and their value in Ireland;
- Encourage the development of national wetland policies and provide advice to policy makers;
- Support wetland education and public awareness of wetlands;
- Promote the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Ireland (www.ramsar.org).

