



LoughAllenBasin
.com

'LAB' is a private voluntary enterprise, but one which we would be happy to see becoming a larger public not-for-profit organisation aimed at drawing down further EU funding for the area, creating employment, and protecting Lough Allen's Environment, Habitats, and its unique collection of Species both rare and not so rare.



(Norman Little, Boyle Camera Club)

Lough Allen looking south from Corry Strand on a fine Autumn day. This photograph catches the character of the Lake with long vistas and ever smaller islands spawning off larger ones.

WHAT WE DO?

RESEARCH: This year we have undertaken much research into plant distribution (including the rare ones), monitored breeding water birds, undertaken bat surveys, and preliminary depth surveying of the whole lake aimed at possible future research into the puzzling and amazing fish from the Ice Age, the Pollan!

RECORD: This can be either a methodical survey (e.g. Orchids), continuous observation of breeding successes among Birds, participation in specific nationwide counts (Daubenton's Bats), regular observations of unusual or infrequent animals and plants (e.g Marsh Fritillary, Blue-eyed Grass, Barn Owls, Eagles).

PHOTOGRAPH: This year's Photos have concentrated on the many breeding water birds of Lough Allen, significant plants, the landscape (with the assistance of **Boyle Camera Club**), and the geology and aesthetics of the lake.

PROPOSE IDEAS: Our research confirms what we always knew... **Lough Allen is a very special place!** In 2009 a conservation strategy was developed in association with farming interests and with REPS in mind.

*This year's work has been to identify the resources for a bigger programme... a regional Nature Reserve set up with partnership from the local community, business interests, and the **EU LIFE+ Biodiversity fund**. We need committed, technical, young and experienced allies, if we are to implement such a scheme which would, undoubtedly, have enormous benefits both for conservation (Nature) and society (Jobs).*

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'LAB' Top Dozen Spectacular Species

1. Irish Lady's Tresses
2. Blue-eyed Grass
3. Red-breasted Merganser
4. Pollan
5. Mysis relicta (Shrimp)
6. Lapwing
7. Common Sandpiper
8. Common Tern
9. Marsh Fritillary
10. Mudwort
11. Black-headed Gull
12. Common Gull



A NATURE RESERVE?

WHY? Research highlights what a unique collection of features Lough Allen has that have to date been only poorly recorded by outside experts. But most people of the community do realise what they have!

BIODIVERSITY. Many species present in Lough Allen are more successful here than in many other parts of Ireland. There is a diverse range of them (*Left*). Several are very rare even in world terms.

RECREATION & EDUCATION. No Nature Reserve exists within a convenient distance of Lough Allen or has comparable natural resources. If we were to seek one it would be in the far north or west of Ireland_ a long way to travel to show your children some 'nature' or to unwind after a long day!

HOW?

The good News is... ***it's possible!***

1. We use the **EU LIFE+** scheme. Undersubscribed in Ireland, they would welcome a good submission!
2. Lough Allen can apply under the **Biodiversity Section** and the EU then provides more funding. 100% of the cost of land and structural costs can be claimed during the course of the project leaving Lough Allen with a fully paid-for facility after 5 years!
3. We have attended an EU/Dept. Conference on the implementation of such a project and can provide full information to any interested parties. But we do need Community support and matching local funding (but this will be less than for some LIFE projects).

Amazing Rare and Interesting Plants

The **Blue-eyed Grass** and **Irish Lady's Tresses**, are very rare 'glacial relicts' which have survived in Ireland and Scotland and across the Atlantic, but not in Europe. There are a number of such species particular to Ireland. These two have a significant foothold in Lough Allen. The Blue-eyed Grass being very local but consistent and flowering over a long period. (It can flower and set seed continuously.) The Orchid has a wider distribution but is very irregular in its flowering habits.

The rest might be called 'axiophytes'... plants we like or appreciate and possible "*indicators of habitat that is considered important for conservation, such as ancient woodlands, clear water and species-rich meadows.*" We are not claiming these are rare plants but they are important for the ecosystem.

Other rare plants (such as Mudwort) are not featured here; Shoreweed is a significant relative. It is really the whole collection of rare, significant, varied and beautiful species that makes the flowers of Lough Allen... so **well worth conserving!**



Heath Spotted Orchid



Creeping Jenny



Amphibious Bistort



Shoreweed



Royal Fern



Lesser Butterfly Orchid



Blue-eyed Grass



Irish Lady's Tresses

BIRDS of Lough Allen.

Last year we anxiously awaited the flowering season for *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* (the Orchid). Abundant some years (like 2008) when we discovered major new instances along the east shore of the Lake. But not last year... just 1 flower! So we reckoned that if Lough Allen was to be protected, a whole new group of species (Birds) would have to be studied and evaluated to strengthen our case for establishing Lough Allen as an important Nature Reserve...

COMMON TERN:

The most inland of these seabirds, this is a major plus for Lough Allen, and a bird which can be easily encouraged to stay and breed, judging by the evidence of this year. Four birds were present initially and then two remained throughout the Summer trying to establish a nesting territory and prospecting new areas. (Breeding rafts are often provided elsewhere for this species.)

LAPWING:

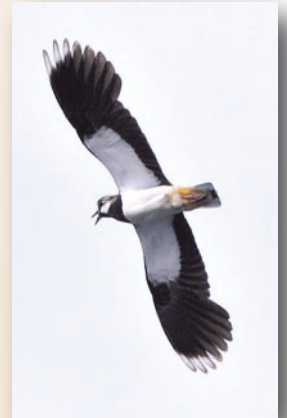
Formerly a common bird but now facing serious decline throughout Europe where many agencies are struggling to protect them. Much work needs to be done around Lough Allen to try and save this species. Up to 7 birds were present at the south end of the Lake but were driven from nesting areas by Hooded Crows and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Special protected areas need to be established for this species. Another wader, the Curlew, is also in serious decline!

Common SANDPIPER:

A charismatic bird of Lough Allen whose piping call can be heard everywhere around the lake during the early Summer. This is definitely one of this species strongholds and they breed successfully all around the lake. Not an endangered species but not often so visible!



This Study has been successful. Notes on 2010 Survey are given here. (More technical details on the Website.)



Red-breasted MERGANSER:

A northern species (uncommon in much of Ireland), Lough Allen has a good group of these attractive fish feeders. They are typical of the West of Ireland and are a sea duck for much of the year. They are struggling to survive on Lough Allen mainly due to predation by the Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull:

Lough Allen is unusual in having 3 species of Gulls breeding inland. Some of these species are now declining and under threat elsewhere, so it is significant to have them all breeding here. But one of them is very cruel; the Lesser Black-backed Gull persecutes its neighbours relentlessly and significantly impacts on their breeding success. So how do we keep the Gulls but also protect the Terns and Ducks? Possibly there is some good management technique that may achieve this. We would seek to maintain populations of all species but conservation is often jeopardised from within by other members of the Wildlife community!

Wigeon taking off from Lough Allen.



Winter Birds.

Not only does Lough Allen have many breeding birds but also provides a haven for a variety of attractive waterfowl in Winter. Whooper Swans feed on the muddy shores; Wigeon (left) are also increasing. Large numbers of Lapwing are also in the area over winter.

We have never seen so many waterfowl on the Lake. Some species of Duck may be hunted but we would like to see more reserve areas established to help build up stocks, and other measures taken (like trying to control water levels) to assist both breeding and winter feeding birds. A healthy population of waterfowl would attract visitors to the area and enhance Lough Allen's value to us all.

This party of Whooper Swans, visitors from Iceland, has a good percentage of young birds.



Lesser Black-backed Gulls breed on Round Island and Gull Island but prey heavily on other nesting water birds!



Other Wonders of Lough Allen!

The Pollan (left) is another mystery of Lough Allen. Some work has been done on it but little specific information is available. It does occur here, as does an unusual Shrimp (*Mysis relicta*). Pollan is **another conservation target for the Lake!**

Pollan is a salmonid and is another of those species which are a remnant from a distant past. It used to occur in all Shannon Lakes but is now very rare. It also occurs in Lough Neagh and was the basis of a fishery there. Otherwise it's only found in northern Russia as a migratory fish in and out of the Arctic Ocean. We hope to investigate this fish further next year so in 2010 we conducted a grid based depth survey of Lough Allen to identify deep pockets where it might be found. The Shrimp (on which it may feed) is known to rise at night and descend during the day and we have detected some dense very small echos, following this pattern, on our sounder?

Lough Allen's abiotic environment.

Earth, wind, water, all formed Lough Allen and still very much govern it. The Lough Allen Basin is a gentle saucer shape of Carboniferous rocks. But these are mainly Sandstones and Shales. On the mountain tops thick bedded strata bear coal and ironstone nodules which now may be found around the lake shore. Along the lake shore the geology is mainly shale from various different formations of the **Leitrim Group** of rocks. This bedrock is very little exposed around the lake but where it occurs in can be very interesting.

Photo by Amy Clarke

The photo on the right shows the bright yellow of a very thin layer of **Doobally Sandstone** sitting in between thicker beds of **Bellavally Shale**. This sandstone is massive and coarse grained elsewhere (Dowra) but around north and west shores of Lough Allen it is a bed scarcely 30 cms. thick. Both it and the surrounding shale are fossiliferous but seem to contain different varieties of fossils.

Susan Duffy

The fossil shown on the right is from the north shore of Lough Allen. It seems to be lying the way it died and to occur only in the Doobally silt stone (a fine sandstone). This is a Nautilus type animal that has survived for 500 million years! It is well represented here but may not be found in similar rock elsewhere. Fossilisation was a unique event where shallow water silt, free swimming squid-like animals, and deeper water shales all came together. This fossil does not seem to occur in the adjoining shales.



Getting INVOLVED!

First thing to say is.... we can't pay you, but maybe others will! We would love to be able to provide some Summer work or Internships for Students and would welcome any ideas in this regard?

We already have had some community participation and, wherever we have gone, we have been stunned by the warm welcome and the forgiveness of our trespasses! The people of Lough Allen seem to share **a deep and abiding respect for the environment** and a good knowledge of its history. We keep expecting to meet someone who can show us records of its rare fauna and flora dating back to earlier centuries. But the best help you can give is by being vigilant and **recognising something rare** in your place.



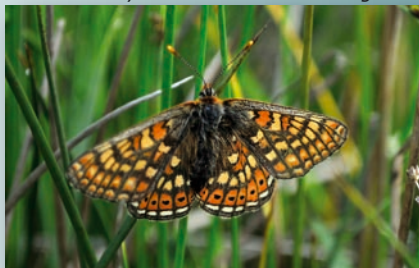
Silver-washed Fritillary from Lough Allen

There are **certain arduous or awkward tasks** that should be undertaken. There is litter along the shores in particular areas where wind and water combine to pile it up. Some invasive species are taking a foothold and **badly need to be removed**. Effective action regarding small pollution problems (like sewage treatment) would also greatly benefit the area.

Interesting work like building bird hides and breeding rafts for certain species will probably have to wait for a Reserve to be established!

Maybe you might consider and support the idea of a **LIFE+ scheme?** (*Details are available on Website.*)

Marsh Fritillary also occurs around Lough Allen



Our WEB Site!

LoughAllenBasin.com is where you can find us. Like many well funded projects (and we are not one of them), LAB relies totally on its website to keep up to date with reporting, publishing and promoting ideas.

We would cordially invite you to browse our pages and apologise for some typos and hurried reporting you may find. We do concentrate our efforts in making sure we get our important facts right, both scientific, technical, and names and places!

A few recent pages are shown as thumbnails below:

Go to...

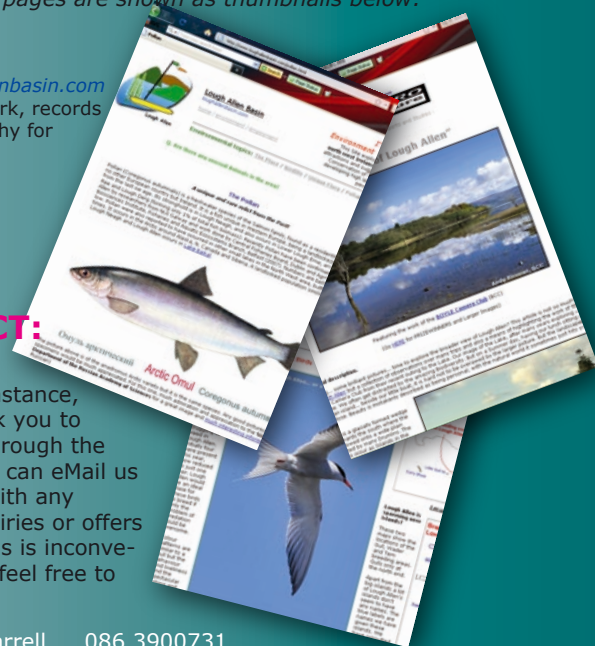
www.loughallenbasin.com
to view our work, records and photography for 2010.

CONTACT:

In the first instance, we would ask you to contact us through the Website. You can eMail us from there with any specific enquiries or offers of help. If this is inconvenient please feel free to contact us:

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LoughAllenBasin.com is based in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, Ireland



The Glorious Flowers of Lough Allen...

Spiranthes romanzoffiana

For a Lake of its size, Lough Allen boasts an amazing and unique range of rare and unusual flowering plants. These include the **Irish Lady's Tresses** shown on the right. Only discovered here at the start of the millennium, they are in a perilous situation. Since active monitoring started they have been recorded with up to 300 flowering spikes in 2008, 2 in 2009, and 69 in 2010. This plant is not found anywhere else in Europe or Asia except in the Scottish Isles and the West of Ireland. The Lough Allen Tresses are an important remnant and a very significant element of Lough Allen's Biodiversity. Its presence here is of global significance and maintaining it is of great value and well justifies the cost and employment that it may need. EU LIFE+ affords a way to both create local jobs and to protect this plant and this place!

(See Page 3 for more plants of Lough Allen.)

WHERE?

Rare plants such as these can be found all around Lough Allen. They need our protection! Look in peaceful places where there is little disturbance. Fresh air, gentle exercise, seeing something new and unusual...



What you CAN DO?

Watch out for them on your Land!

They occur on the shoreline in the midzone that is flooded in winter and may be dry in the Summer.

Protect Them!

These plants are a protected species. By all means enjoy them, take photographs, but don't harm them.

Tell the Kids...

... how extremely rare they are. Found in the 'old world' only in Ireland and Scotland. They can observe them, look for Bees on them, draw them... but leave them where they are.

Tell us...

We can provide or obtain much advice and support for you. It is very important to know where they appear every year as they may be getting even scarcer!

Look for them on quiet shores, grassy or stony...

(Photograph by Margaret Dolan)

www.loughallenbasin.com

