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## Lough Ateesky, County Galway O.S. L 781 307

O.S. Discovery Sheet 44



**Conservation Designation:** Kilkieran Bay and Islands SAC 002111

**General description:**

A small (2ha), shallow (<1m) “saltmarsh” lagoon, situated 1km south of Carna, Co. Galway, north of the road to Mweenish Island. The bed of the lagoon is mostly bare mud and salinity is generally high and measured 31psu at the time of sampling (7/10/06).

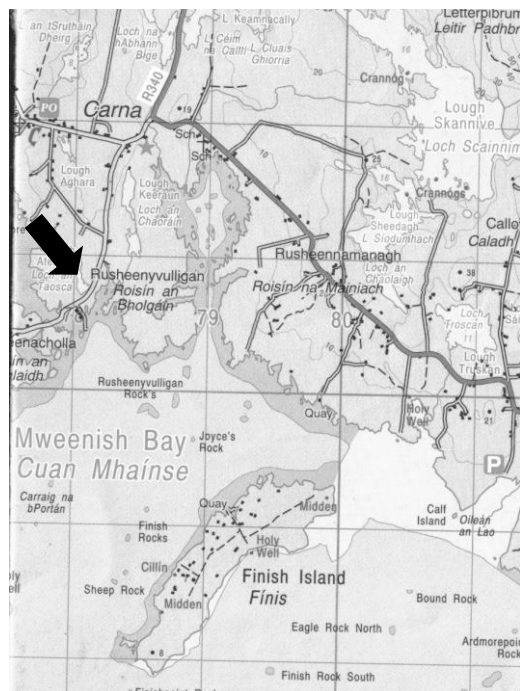


Figure 65.1 Location map of L. Ateesky.

L. Ateesky was surveyed on 7/10/06 for aquatic fauna and flora. The lagoon is small, and relatively homogeneous, and the entire lagoon was sampled as a single sampling station (Figure 65.2, Table 65.1)

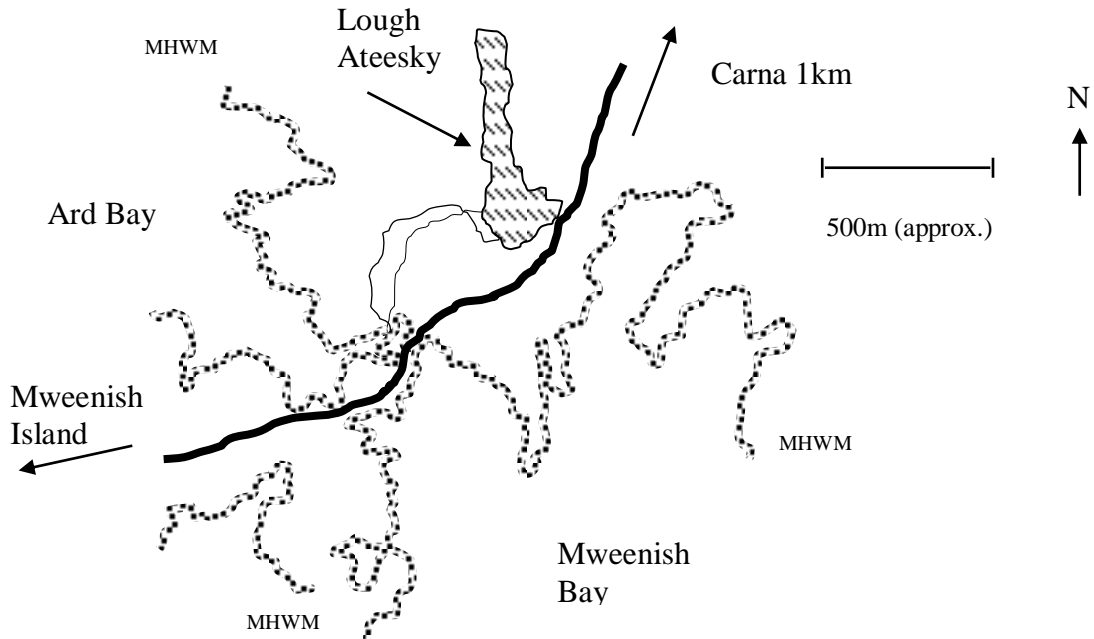


Figure 65.2 Sketch map of Lough Ateesky lagoon.

**Flora**

Lough Ateesky is an “estuarine” lagoon and most of the bed of the lagoon consisted of bare, soft mud (Table 65.1).

Table 65.1 Percentage cover of vegetation and bare ground in Lough Ateesky on 7/10/06, with salinity, temperature, depth of water and type of substratum. Species in bold text are lagoonal specialists. + = present

GPS position	L 78037 30728
Salinity (psu)	31.2
Temperature	14.6
Depth (cm)	0-30
Substratum	soft mud, occasional hard surfaces
<b>Percentage cover:</b>	
<b>Algae</b>	
<b>Chlorophyceae</b>	
<i>Chaetomorpha linum</i>	50
<i>Cladophora</i> sp.	+
<i>Enteromorpha</i> sp.	5
<i>Ulva</i> sp.	+
<b>Phaeophyceae</b>	
<i>Ascophyllum nodosum</i>	drift
<i>Fucus vesiculosus</i>	drift
<b>Bare soft mud</b>	50

Only six floral taxa were recorded when sampled in 2006, most of which are common estuarine algae. One species (*Chaetomorpha linum*) is a lagoonal specialist, but even this species is common in lagoonal habitats in Ireland.

There is some doubt about the taxonomic status of the unattached lagoonal form of *C. linum*, and it was recorded by Hatch and Healy (1998) as *C. mediterranea*. It is a common, characteristic alga of semi-isolated Irish lagoons, recorded at 49 of the 87 (56.3%) lagoons surveyed.

Based on floral taxa, Lough Ateesky is rated as of **low conservation value**.

## Fauna

Most of the bed of the lagoon consists of bare, soft mud, which is a characteristically species-poor habitat. Only 15 faunal taxa were recorded (Table 65.2), all of which are common estuarine animals, with the possible exception of a small amphipod *Leptocheirus pilosus* (unconfirmed), which is a proposed specialist for Ireland. Only one other species is a lagoonal specialist (*P. varians*), and even this species is often common in estuaries and is one of the most common “specialists” found in lagoons.

Table 65.2 Faunal taxa recorded at stations in Lough Ateesky 7/10/06.

r = rare, o = occasional, c = common, a = abundant. Species in bold text are lagoonal specialists

			Sta 1
<b>Nematoda</b>		indet.	o
<b>Annelida</b>			
	Polychaeta	<i>Nereis diversicolor</i>	r
		Syllidae indet.	r
<b>Crustacea</b>			
	Mysidacea	<i>Praunus flexuosus</i>	o
	Amphipoda	<i>Gammarus</i>	o
		<b>?<i>Leptocheirus pilosus</i></b>	a
	Decapoda	<i>Carcinus maenas</i>	o
		<i>Palaemon elegans</i>	o
		<i>Palaemon serratus</i>	o
		<b><i>Palaemonetes varians</i></b>	o
<b>Insecta</b>			
	Diptera	Chironomidae indet.	o
<b>Mollusca</b>			
	Gastropoda	<i>Hydrobia ulvae</i>	o
<b>Bryozoa</b>		<i>Bowerbankia gracilis</i>	o
<b>Tunicata</b>		<i>Ciona intestinalis</i>	o
		Polyclinidae indet.	o
<b>Pisces</b>		<i>Pomatoschistus microps</i>	c

***Leptocheirus pilosus*** Amphipod crustacean recorded at three lagoons in Co. Cork (Rostellan, Cuskinny, and Rosscarbery) in association with *C. insidiosum* and possibly Raffeen (unconfirmed), and also at L. Ateesky (unconfirmed) and L. Athola, Co. Galway and Furnace L., Co. Mayo. The only other known Irish localities are the south side of Wexford Harbour (Costello *et al.* 1989) and on the North Slob, Co. Wexford (Galvin 1992). Proposed as a lagoonal specialist for Ireland by Oliver and Healy (1998).

***Palaemonetes varians*** Decapod crustacean listed as a lagoonal specialist in the U.K. by Barnes (1989) and Bamber (1997), but apparently is no longer regarded as such. Although found in estuaries, this species appears to be far more characteristic of lagoons in Ireland, found in 64 of the 87 lagoons surveyed (73.6%) and may require a

lagoonal environment for reproduction. Therefore, it remains on the proposed list of lagoonal specialists for Ireland.

Lough Ateesky is an “estuarine” lagoon and is relatively species-poor. Apart from the unconfirmed amphipod, *L. pilosus*, none of the other fauna recorded are particularly rare. The presence of the tunicate *Ciona intestinalis* is interesting, but it is only found on hard substrates provided mostly by domestic refuse. If the identity of the amphipod is confirmed the site would be rated as of moderate conservation. If it proves to be a more common species, the site would be rated as of **low conservation value**.

### Summary

Lough Ateesky is a small, shallow "**saltmarsh**" lagoon with relatively low number of taxa (6 floral, 15 faunal). A maximum of three lagoonal specialists were recorded in 2006. Two of these are very common in lagoonal habitats in Ireland, but one of them (*Leptocheirus pilosus* unconfirmed) is a rare amphipod. Apart from the unconfirmed amphipod, none of the other fauna recorded are particularly unusual. If the identity of the amphipod is confirmed the site would be rated as of moderate conservation. If it proves to be a more common species, the site would be rated as of **low conservation value**.

**Overall Conservation Value = Low/Moderate**

### Conservation Status Assessment (from Oliver 2007)

Impacts	Mostly very shallow. Natural eutrophication. Temperatures may be high in summer, resulting in death and decay. Silting up.
Conservation Status	<b>Unfavourable-Inadequate</b>

### Further Information

This site was only added to the list of lagoons in 2006. Included in the Conservation Status Report (Oliver 2007). The Carna Research Station may have some further information, but otherwise none is available.

### References:

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- Barnes, R.S.K. 1989. Coastal lagoons of Britain: an overview and conservation appraisal. *Biological Conservation* **49**: 295–313.
- Costello, M.J., Holmes, J.M.C., McGrath, D. & Myers, A.A. 1989. A review and catalogue of the Amphipoda (Crustacea) in Ireland. *Irish Fisheries Investigations. Series B (Marine)*, **33**: 3-70.
- Galvin, P. 1992. *The ecology of the brackish-water lagoons of Wexford and east Cork*. MSc thesis, University College, Dublin.
- Hatch, P. & Healy, B. 1998. Aquatic vegetation of Irish coastal lagoons. *Bulletin of the Irish Biogeographical Society*. **21**: 2-21.
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