

28. Lough Gur

Lough Gur is the largest lake in Limerick and is an important site for wintering birds, whilst the Lake Bog is one of the largest areas of fen in the county. Lough Gur regularly supports nationally important numbers of Gadwall and Shoveler. Over 2,000 water birds can be seen here during the winter months.

From Limerick City take the Kilmallock Road [R512] south. (Bus Éireann runs a service to Kilmallock via Holycross, tel. 061-313333). Turn left at Holycross [Riordan's pub], 4km before reaching Bruff. After a short distance you will see the lake on the left. Continue along passing **Point 3** and turn left at the crossroads. Turn left again at the next junction, which leads to the Interpretative Centre and car park [**Point 1**].

Walking distance 5km, Time 1.5 hrs. Terrain easy. O.S. Map 65: Start grid ref R648413

Start at the car park [Point 1] that overlooks the lake where you can scan the water for wildfowl. This is a favourite place for feeding the birds. Tufted Duck, Mallard,

Mute Swan, Grey Heron, Coot, Moorhen, Great Crested Grebe and Little Grebe all breed here. During the winter the number of birds increases; Wigeon, Teal, Pochard, Shoveler, Gadwall are regularly seen, with smaller numbers of Goldeneye, Pintail and Shelduck. In the past there have been interesting sightings of Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Pink-footed Goose and Little Egret. On the shoreline and in the nearby fields Curlew, Lapwing and Golden Plover often roost. There is a feral population of Greylag Geese; this flock attracts visiting geese to join them, so it is worth checking to see if there are any migrants amongst them. In the evenings the Whooper Swans return from feeding in nearby fields. These birds all come from Iceland and some are ringed. Any sightings of these should be reported.

From the car park walk back along the entrance road, passing the toilets. There is a path on the right beside a green hut. The trees in this area have a huge flock of roosting Jackdaws and Rooks. These trees are mainly Willow, Ash, Oak, Birches, Alder and Beech. Polypody Fern can be seen on the branches of the Oak, whilst the abundant Ivy-leaved Toadflax grows over the stone wall. Flag Iris occurs in the wet areas. Look for Bee Orchids amongst the grass. Orange Tip, Small Copper, Speckled Wood, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Small White and Green-veined White butterflies have all been seen at various times of the year.



The Lake Bog (Tony Mee)



Lough Gur

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Garrett Island (Tony Mee)



Banded Jewelwing (Padraig O'Callaghan)

As you walk along the path watch out for the Treecreeper as it climbs up the trunks of trees. The aquatic vegetation of this shallow, naturally rich lake includes Rigid Hornwort, Fennel Pondweed and Ivy-leaved Duckweed. These are all best seen when washed up on the shoreline, where they are food for the birds. Follow the path around a wet area of scrub, where Greenfinch, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit and Blue Tit can be seen flying through the trees. Barn Owls are seen regularly around the castle at night. Along the water's edge Stonechats and Reed Buntings are regularly looking for small insects. Damselflies are in abundance; Common Bluet, Common Bluetip, Spring Redtail, Common Spreadwing, Azure Bluet and Small Bluetip have all been recorded around the lake. The larger dragonflies include Spring

Hawker, Amber-winged Hawker, Four-spotted Chaser and Common Darter. Walk on as far as a wire fence at Ash Point **[Point 2]**. Here you can see Garrett Island in the distance, where Cormorants roost on the trees. Knockadoon Hill rises to the south where there is a rock known locally as Carraig an Iolair (Eagle's rock).

Walk back to the car park and then follow the entrance road. Pass the Public House on the right and keep to the right at the junction. At the crossroads turn right. The road overlooks the Lake Bog. Listen out for the squealing sound of Water Rail during the evening and Sedge Warblers that are common during the summer. Continue along the road until you reach the lay-by **[Point 3]**. By climbing over the wire fence and entering the field, you can observe the far end of the lake near a rocky outcrop. Along the southern shores of Lough Gur there are stands of Common Club-rush, Reed Canary-grass and Water Horsetail, which has hollow stems. The majority of birds occur at this end of the lake, where there is least disturbance. January is the best month as bird numbers peak; in the fields, migrant Fieldfares and Redwings mix in with the Starlings. Ravens soar above the hillside whilst Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are never too far away. The walk finishes here. Retrace your way back to the starting point.

