

Reserves

County Mayo: Annagh Marsh

Dave Suddaby describes the attractions of Annagh Marsh reserve on the Mullet peninsula



The Annagh Marsh complex on the Mullet peninsula in Co Mayo extends over 30 hectares at the southernmost part of the Special Protection Area (SPA) of Termoncarragh Lake and Annagh Machair. This area is internationally important for large winter gatherings of **Barnacle Geese**, along with other geese, ducks and swans.

During the winter months, the morning and evening skies come alive with the sounds of Barnacle Geese as they fly back and forth from the offshore islands and Termoncarragh. The spectacle is mixed with the sights and sounds of **Whooper Swans** and **Choughs** feeding on the grasslands.

Annagh Marsh isn't only recognised as a place for winter wildlife but also as the southernmost breeding site in the world for **Red-necked Phalaropes**. This stunning little bird is unfortunately very rare today, but a visit in spring or summer brings the sounds of other breeding birds, with the songs of **Lapwing**, **Snipe**, **Skylark**, **Sedge Warbler** and **Reed Bunting** filling the air. With luck, you may also catch the distinctive trilling of a **Dunlin** or the reeling of a **Grasshopper Warbler**, or maybe even the creaking "crex, crex" song of a nearby **Corncrake**.

In summer, the site is carpeted with wildflowers – more than 110 species have been recorded. Particularly abundant are **Purple Marsh Orchids**, offering wonderful floral displays in June.

Looking closer, some very rare insects can be found, including **Belted Beauty moth**, **Irish Click-beetle**, **Red-banded Sand Wasp** and **Great Yellow Bumblebee**.

Both **Otter** and the distinctive **Irish Hare** are found throughout the area.

Work we are doing at Annagh

Our aim is to manage our national network of nature reserves to provide the best examples of key bird habitats in Ireland, making a real contribution to priority species conservation and, where possible, offering natural places where people can enjoy wildlife. To accomplish this, local branches are playing a vital role, and your support as an individual or a member of a local branch is crucial.

Our management aims at Annagh Marsh are to:

- Enhance breeding wader numbers
- Encourage the Red-necked Phalarope to return as a nesting species
- Protect the breeding birds from predators
- Enhance the wider flora and fauna
- Maintain the remote wilderness and disturbance-free status of the area.

Visitor information:

How to find us

By car or bike

Annagh Marsh is located 68km west of Ballina, Co Mayo, following the N59 and R313 into Belmullet. From Belmullet, it is 6km west following the R313 to Blacksod and turning off at the first right and then the fourth left to Annagh Head. The reserve is located on the right after 3km.



DAVE SUDDABY

Lapwing chicks

By public transport

Mainline rail goes to Ballina. Bus Éireann travels to Ballina and thereafter to Belmullet and Blacksod. Note that there is no public transport to Annagh, although taxis are available from Belmullet.

Entry

Visitors are asked to respect the habitats and wildlife of the Annagh Marsh area by keeping to the public roads and boundary tracks at all times and not causing undue noise. The whole area can be viewed with ease from these tracks. No bird-viewing hides are present. Please keep dogs under control at all times.

We hope you enjoy your visit!

Don't miss:

- **Lapwing** fledglings taking their first flight – a symbol of how the right care and conditions can reverse declines
- **Snipe** drumming against the starlit sky in summer
- **Barnacle Geese** in flocks numbering up to 1,000 in winter
- **Choughs** 'tumbling' around in flocks of up to 30 in autumn
- **Skylarks** with their song filling the spring air
- **Marsh Orchids** carpetting the grasslands with purple flowers in June
- **Irish Hares** 'boxing' on an early spring day

DAVE SUDDABY



Annagh Marsh



Snipe

SHAY CONNOLLY

➔ Further information about Annagh Marsh Reserve is available from BirdWatch Ireland HQ and the BirdWatch Ireland website