

Tacumshin Lake

Tacumshin Lake

Part 1: Introduction and the protected areas.

Location of the lake

Tacumshin Lake is located at Irish Grid Ref T 04 06 on the South Wexford Coast. The lake lies 16km due south of Wexford town and about halfway between Kilmore Quay and Carnsore Point^{1 & 2}.



Location map: screenshot from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 004615. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.

Meaning of the placename

In Irish, the placename is 'Loch Sáile'; in English 'Tacumshin Lake'. The Irish 'Loch Sáile' means 'Saltwater Lake'. The English 'Tacumshin Lake' simply refers to the waterbody in the civil parish of Tacumshin (Irish: 'Teach Coimseáin')³.



The ivy-covered ruin of St Catherine's church, the former parish church of Tacumshin.

'Teach Coimseáin' translates as 'Coimseáin's house' and possibly refers to a religious settlement associated with Saint Catherine's, the former parish church located in the townland of Churchtown^{4, 5 & 6}.

Access to the lake

Tacumshin Lake can be accessed by road at five points (map right):

- ❖ directly at The White Hole (T 031 056), Lingstown Lower (T 038 072), Sigginstown west (T 056 066), Sigginstown south (T 061 063) and
- ❖ indirectly by walking west (right) along the dunes from Rostonstown (T 081 052).

The lake, barrier and surrounding lands are all privately owned. The rights of landowners and their right to access their properties should, of course, be respected at all times.

The foundation of rock

Moving from the southeast corner to the northwest corner, diagonal bands of five rock units underlie the lake: Carnsore Granite, Saltee Granite, Kilmore Quay Group, Greenore Point Group and Ballycogley Group. While the first three rock units are not exposed anywhere around the lake, there are several exposures of the latter two units at the northern end of the lake. Rocks in the Greenore Point Group were formed from parent materials that were igneous, possibly volcanic. The main rock types present are amphibolites. These are exposed at Grange. Rocks in the Ballycogley Group were formed from sediments. The main rock types are grey-green slates, thin siltstones, shale, greywacke sandstones and conglomerates. These rocks are exposed in the Bargo Stream and near Tomhaggard village and are believed to be about 520 million years old⁷.

Vegetation

Sixteen plant communities, six wetland and ten dry substrate, are recognised at Tacumshin Lake⁸. Together with Common Reed, one of the most widespread plants on the lake floor is the Sea Club-rush, a sedge with a tall, solid, sharply three-angled, leafy stem supporting clusters of dark brown flowers (pictured).

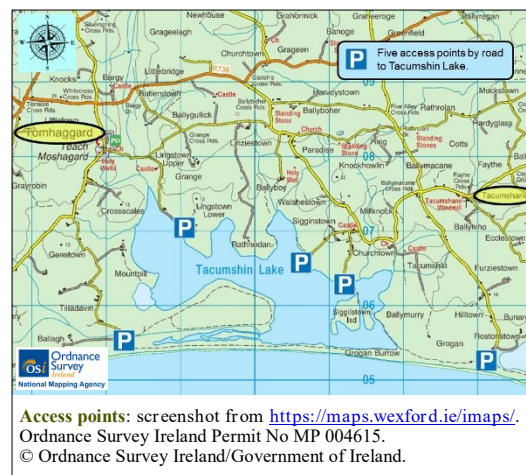


The rich earth

Soils around the lake are predominantly Clashmore Series Brown Earths. These deep, fertile, well-drained soils are derived from coarse loamy drift with siliceous stones⁹.

Fish fauna of the lake

The Three-spined Stickleback is the most abundant species of fish in the lake. Small numbers of Sand Goby, Eel, Rudd and Flounder also occur¹⁰.



Access points: screenshot from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 004615. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.

Text and photographs by Jim Hurley, SWC Promotions, Grange, Kilmore, Co Wexford Y35 YN35. E-mail swc@eircom.net. Telephone: (053) 912 9671. Mobile: (086) 163 7199. Copies available as a PDF file on request via e-mail from swc@eircom.net. Version: 201508. SWC Promotions: promoting the natural heritage resource values of the South Wexford Coast.



Barrier-lagoon system

Tacumshin Lake is a barrier-lagoon system. The barrier is the shore-parallel, wedge-shaped ridge known locally as 'the burrow' (pictured right). Tacumshin Lake is the lagoon located on the northern or landward side of the barrier. The present lagoon occupies the remains of the formerly extensive basin of a glacial meltwater lake and channel^{11, 12, 13 & 9}. The barrier is also part of the area's glacial legacy.

Great Barrier Coast

The South Wexford Coast is Ireland's Great Barrier Coast as it is the coastline that gives greatest expression to the 'Southern barrier, lagoon and cliff erosion province' in the classification of Ireland's coastlines into geomorphological regions¹⁴.

At its maximum extent, the Tacumshin barrier is about 7.8km long and comprises part of the townland of Ringbaun and all of Ringbaun Burrow, Ballagh Burrow, Mountpill Burrow and Grogan Burrow.



Averaging about 75m wide (range 30m-140m), the wedge-shaped barrier varies in height 1m-7m. It is composed of mixed sand, grit, gravel and cobbles and its vegetation cover is dominated by Marram grass.

The lagoon

Tacumshin Lake is the lagoon behind the barrier. The lagoon contains a varying mix of freshwater and seawater and supports plants and animals that have uniquely evolved to thrive in such conditions. These particular plants and animals are regarded as 'lagoonal specialists'.

Lady's Island Lake is the largest lagoon in Ireland (350ha). Tacumshin Lake is the third largest (257ha) after Broadmeadow, Malahide Estuary, Co Dublin (280ha). Together, Lady's Island Lake and Tacumshin Lake comprise 29% of Ireland's resource of lagoon habitat¹⁵.

Nature conservation

The Tacumshin Lake area is subject to the following two designations: Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation.



Pale-bellied Brent Geese on the lagoon.



The low-lying Tacumshin barrier (centre) with the Celtic Sea (right) and the lagoon (left).

Special Protection Area

Special Protection Areas are areas designated to protect wild birds.

Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Name Tacumshin Lake, Site Code No IE004092, has an area of 476ha and comprises the lagoon, the islands known as 'The Patches' and various marginal wetlands¹⁶.

The qualifying interests of the site are its wetlands and wintering waterbirds especially the following 14 named species of wintering waterbirds listed as species of special conservation interests at the site¹⁶.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| • Little Grebe | • Shoveler |
| • Bewick's Swan | • Tufted Duck |
| • Whooper Swan | • Coot |
| • Wigeon | • Golden Plover |
| • Gadwall | • Grey Plover |
| • Teal | • Lapwing |
| • Pintail | • Black-tailed Godwit |

The site was designated in 1996 by S.I. No 305 of 1996. That statutory instrument was subsequently amended in 2012¹⁷.

Numbers of wintering waterbirds fluctuate widely with an overall downward trend.

The conservation objective for the SPA site is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the 14 bird species listed as special conservation interests for the site.

Other seasonal bird interests of the site are as follows.

- ❖ **Winter:** The diverse waterfowl population and the post-breeding Hen Harrier roost.
- ❖ **Summer:** Marsh Harriers (possibly breeding), Garganey (probably nesting) and Reed Warbler (about 10 pairs breeding).
- ❖ **Autumn:** Passage waders (Ruff, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Wood Sandpiper), roosting Lesser Black-back Gulls, Swallows and martins, North American vagrants and Eurasian waterfowl¹⁶.

Tacumshin Lake is a hotspot for rare birds. News of rarities is very regularly posted online at <https://twitter.com/wexfordbirdnews>.

Little Grebe behaviour

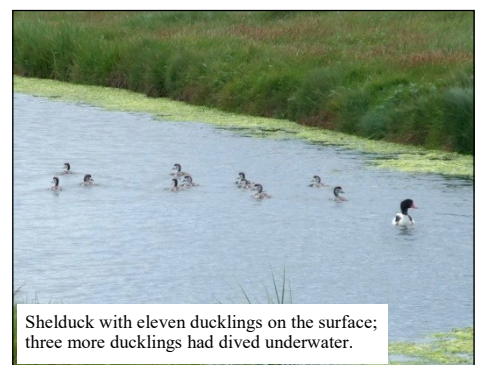
If a Little Grebe is accidentally disturbed off its nest, its eggs are left exposed to predators and possible chilling (below).



If the opportunity presents itself, the bird will quickly return to the nest and cover the exposed eggs with vegetation (below). It is believed that the purpose of this behaviour may be either to conceal the eggs, to keep them warm or humid or both.



Full details with regard to the Tacumshin Lake Special Protection Area for wild birds are available online on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service¹⁶.



Shelduck with eleven ducklings on the surface; three more ducklings had dived underwater.

Special Area of Conservation

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are areas designated to conserve habitats (places) and the non-bird species of plants and animals that these habitats or places support.

Special Area of Conservation Site Name
Tacumshin Lake, Site
Code No IE000709, has
an area of 558.82ha.

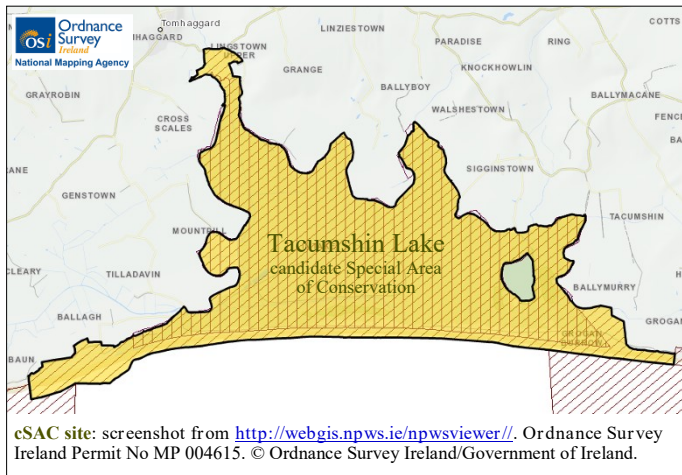
Most of the area overlaps with the SPA outlined above. The most significant additional area included in the SAC but not in the SPA is the seaside beach.

The qualifying interests of the site are the following five habitat types

1. Coastal lagoons [Code No 1150] (a priority habitat type) (74% of the site¹⁸);
2. Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes) [Code No 2120] (14%);
3. Perennial vegetation of stony banks [Code No 1220] (3%);
4. Embryonic shifting dunes [Code No 2110] (2%) and
5. Annual vegetation of drift lines [Code No 1210] (1%).

While publication of a statutory instrument formally designating the site is pending, the site has been legally protected since it was publically notified in the local press¹⁹.

The generic aim of designating the site is to maintain and/or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of European Community interest. Specific conservation objectives and targets to achieve



cSAC site: screenshot from <http://webgis.npws.ie/npwsviewer/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 004615. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.

the generic aim remain to be set for each of the five habitat types that the site has been designated for.

Other interests of the Tacumshin Lake cSAC are as follows

- lagoonal specialists,
- Bearded Stonewort, a Red Data Book alga,
- Lesser Centaury, a rare plant, and
- Common Frog, Common Lizard and Irish Hare²⁰.

The following eight lagoonal specialists or rare species were recorded at Tacumshin Lake during five surveys carried out in the period 1996-2012.

- *Lekanesphaera hookeri*, a woodlouse-like isopod,
- the Atlantic Ditch Shrimp *Palaemonetes varians*,
- the backswimmers *Notonecta viridis* and *Sigara stagnalis*,
- *Enochrus halophilus*, a beetle,
- the Lagoon Cockle *Cerastoderma glaucum*,
- the Spire Snail *Hydrobia ventrosa* and
- *Conopeum seurati*, a colonial bryozoan²¹.

Full details with regard to the Tacumshin Lake candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) are available online on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service²⁰.

The status of the site is rated 'Unfavourable-BAD' due to

- ❖ the way in which water levels are currently managed,
- ❖ disturbance from recreational activities (hunting, horse exercising, motorbikes and quads, dog exercising, bird watching and driving of cars) and
- ❖ invasion by exotics (for example, Soft Hornwort *Ceratophyllum submersum* an invasive exotic that may have originated as an aquarium throw-out or an introduction by wintering waterbirds)^{15, 21 & 24}.



Wildfowling

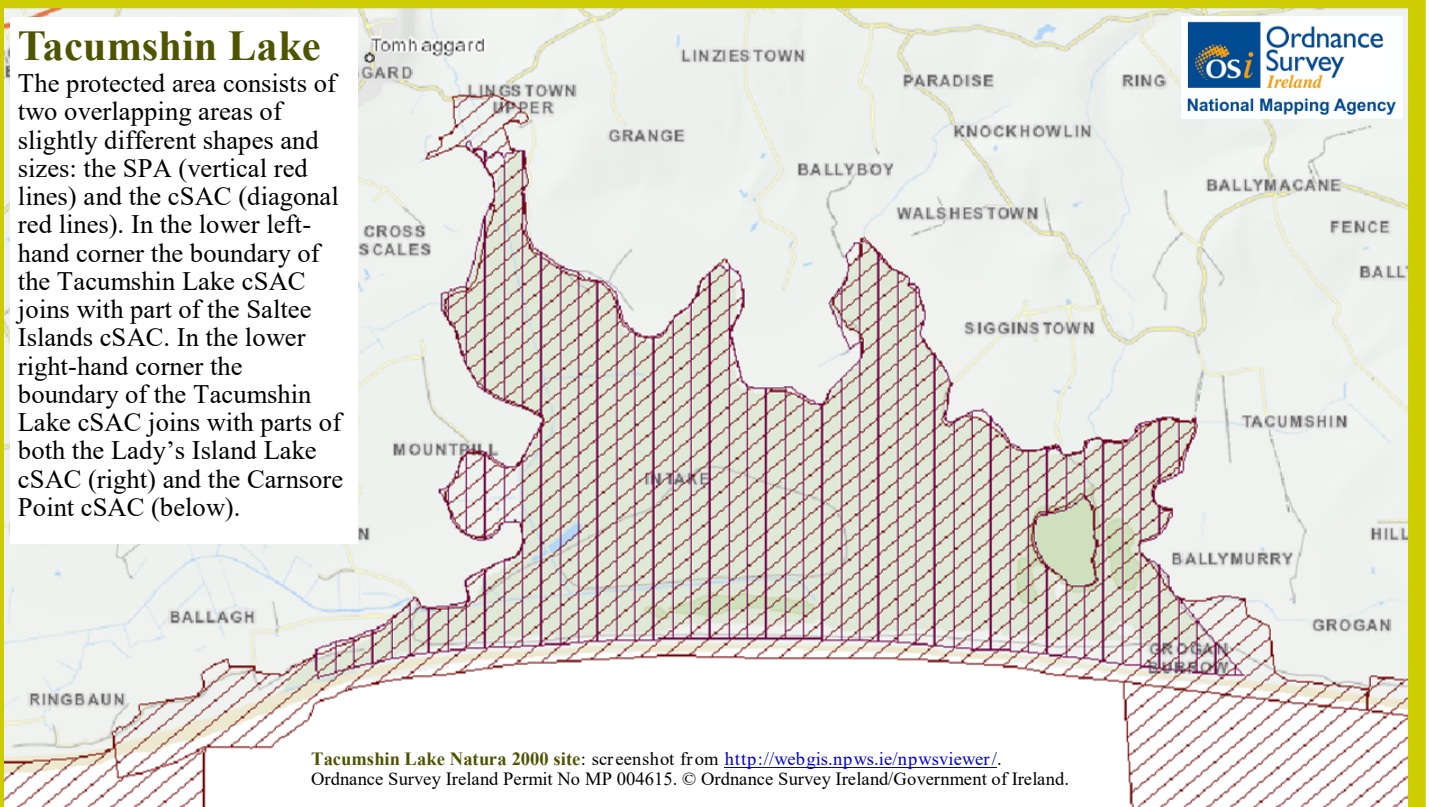
Tacumshin Lake is shot over by wildfowlers. Shooting is managed by the Tomhaggard Game Protection Association (GPA) at the western end of the lake, by the Tacumshane GPA at the eastern end of the lake and by the Joint Lake Committee of both GPAs. Most shooting takes place on Thursdays and Sundays alternating between evening and morning shoots. Three areas of the lake (Lingstown, Sigginstown and the barrier) are Wildfowl Sanctuaries No 56 where shooting of birds is not allowed further to a 1979 Ministerial Order²².

Water quality

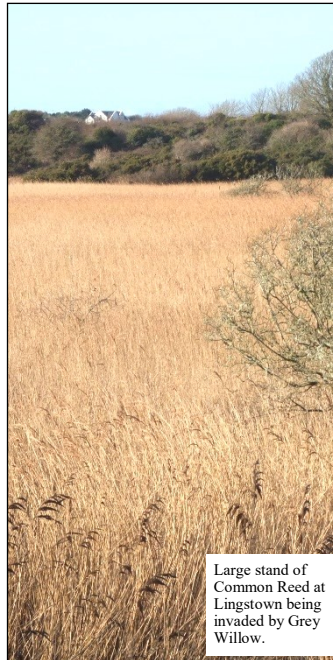
Water quality in the lagoon is rated 'Bad'. Enrichment by phosphates and nitrates is an issue and is believed to be caused by run-off

Tacumshin Lake

The protected area consists of two overlapping areas of slightly different shapes and sizes: the SPA (vertical red lines) and the cSAC (diagonal red lines). In the lower left-hand corner the boundary of the Tacumshin Lake cSAC joins with part of the Saltee Islands cSAC. In the lower right-hand corner the boundary of the Tacumshin Lake cSAC joins with parts of both the Lady's Island Lake cSAC (right) and the Carnsore Point cSAC (below).



Tacumshin Lake Natura 2000 site: screenshot from <http://webgis.npws.ie/npwsviewer/>. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No MP 004615. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.



Large stand of Common Reed at Lingstown being invaded by Grey Willow.

from the surrounding lands in the lagoon's catchment area. Inputs of these nutrients upsets the natural balance of the water in the lagoon and causes plankton to bloom excessively. When these blooms die off they lead to oxygen depletion in the water²³.

Bad water quality results in a loss of biodiversity in the lagoon. However, since plant and animal life continues to survive, albeit in a patchy way, life forms have the potential to spread and thrive if targets to achieve good water quality can be achieved and if water levels are managed in a sustainable way. It is an objective to achieve good water quality status at Tacumshin Lake by 2021.

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Nature conservation

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)²⁴, one of the technical services of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, is the central government body responsible for nature conservation in the Republic of Ireland.

Visiting the lake

Visitors to Tacumshin Lake should be aware that the lake, barrier, Sigginstown Island and lands adjoining the lagoon are privately owned. The rights of landowners should be respected at all times. Concerns regarding nature conservation should be addressed to Tony Murray, the local National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Conservation Ranger, e-mail Tony.Murray@ahg.gov.ie, telephone (076) 100 2662.

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Open water at Tacumshin Lake.