SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MAUMTRASNA MOUNTAIN COMPLEX

SITE CODE: 000735

The Maumtrasna Mountain Complex is situated to the north-east of the Maumturk Mountains and to the west of Lough Mask and Lough Corrib. The site is bounded to the north-west by the Erriff River, to the north-east by the Owenbrin River and to the south-west by the Bealanabrack River and Joyce's River. Most of the mountains exceed 500m in height and more than half of the land within the site lies above an altitude of 300m. The main bedrock in the north and west of the site is Mweelrea Grits, with occasional bands of slate. The remainder of the site is composed of mudstones and sandstones, with occasional outcrops of mica-schist and basic igneous rocks.

The major habitat within the Maumtrasna Mountain Complex is upland grassland on peaty soil. The dominant plant species in this habitat include Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) with occasional Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*). Overgrazing by sheep has greatly reduced the amount of heather cover in these communities and consequently resulted in a large scale change from upland heath to grassland.

The secondary habitat in the site is upland grassland on mineral soil. This is largely confined to a distinct band running parallel to the southern boundary, e.g. at Lugnabrick and Knocknagussy. This vegetation type is generally found in association with sedimentary rocks of Silurian and Ordovician age, other than Mweelrea grits. Typical species found include Bent Grass (*Agrostis* spp.), Fescue Grass (*Festuca* spp.), Mat-grass and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*). Minor habitats present, include upland heath, lowland blanket bog, scree, exposed rock, lakes, flushes, river valleys and streams.

The rare and protected Irish St. John's-wort (*Hypericum canadense*) is found at one location in the site, in a patch of moorland approximately 1.5km east of Lough Nadirkmore.

In areas where cliffs occur at altitude e.g. the Dirkmore and Dirkbeg corries, the cliffs at Lugnabrick and at Benbeg ridge, nationally scarce plant species such as Alpine Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa* subsp. *alpina*), Alpine Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum alpinum*) and Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*) are present.

Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*) has been recorded in Lough Nafooey. This species is listed in the Irish Red Data Book as threatened in Ireland.

The Irish Hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*) has been recorded from the site and is probably widespread. This endemic sub-species is also listed as being threatened in the Irish Red Data Book.

The main damaging operations in the Maumtrasna Mountain Complex are overgrazing and peat-cutting. Sheep grazing is widespread and quite severe within the site. Peat cutting, both by hand and by machine, has become more of a problem in recent years but is largely confined to areas of deep, lowland blanket bog, which is a rare habitat within the site. Other potentially damaging operations here include afforestation, land drainage and reclamation, fertilization, quarrying and dumping.

This site is of interest as it is a good example of an extensive mountain landscape, containing tracts of upland grassland on both peaty and mineral soils. The summits of the mountains within the site, particularly where there are high altitude cliffs and/or base-rich substrates, provide a locus for a good variety of artic/alpine species. The presence of the rare Irish St. John's-wort and other scarce species adds to the interest of the site.

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