

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SLIEVE RUSHEN BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 000009

Slieve Rushen Bog NHA is an extensive upland blanket bog, occurring on the south-east margin of the Cuilcagh Mountain range, approximately 6.5 km south-east of Swanlinbar, Co. Cavan. The northern and north-eastern sides of the site adjoin the international border with Northern Ireland. Conifer plantations extending to the mountain plateau form parts of the north-west, west, south and south-eastern boundaries. Site boundaries in the areas between these plantations include the perimeter of wind power installations, turbary ground and transitions to rough pasture and semi-improved agricultural lands. The townlands covered by the site include Aghanacally, Ballynamadoo, Corneen, Finaghoo, Gortnavreeghan, Legavregra, Finthilough and Mullanacre Upper.

This large site occurs on a broad-topped mountain ridge, with a smaller parallel ridge to the north-west, with flat plateaux and gently sloping areas between the ridges. Bedrock geology is shale and sandstone. In flat and gently sloping terrain the blanket bog is very intact, with wet and locally quaking areas, occasional bog pools and excellent hummock-hollow development. Intact bog moss hummocks up to 1 m wide are common. The higher slopes support drier mountain blanket bog and dry heath habitat, while the lower slopes within the site are covered by dry heath, upland grassland and cutover bog.

The areas of intact blanket bog vegetation are dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), frequent swards of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and abundant Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). On flat or gently sloping ground there is a deep moss cover with a diverse range of bog mosses (*Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. subnitens*, *S. papillosum*, *S. cuspidatum*, *S. magellanicum*). Quaking lawns of bog moss are frequent on pool margins. Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), a species of very local occurrence on blanket bogs, is also present. There is also a diverse lichen (*Cladonia* spp.) flora.

Heath areas on drier knolls are colonised by tall Ling Heather, Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), with frequent Purple Moor-grass and other grasses. Blanket bog and cutover bog in the southern part of the site are also quite dry, possibly due to burning and the effects of drainage from adjacent turbary outside the site. Such drier areas are dominated by Purple Moor-grass with low Ling Heather, Deergrass and frequent Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).

Notable species present within the site include a number of Irish Red Data Book species, including several nesting pairs of Golden Plover. Hen Harrier are recorded as nesting adjacent to the site and use the site as hunting habitat. Irish Hare and Red Grouse have also been recorded from the site.

Apart from light grazing by sheep, most of the site is in good condition and shows a notable lack of disturbance from grazing, burning or drainage. There is very little summit erosion, a common degradation feature of other upland blanket bogs. Damaging land use on the upland, but excluded from the NHA, include wind power installations and infrastructure, afforestation, and extensive mechanical peat-cutting. Potential threats to the successful conservation of the habitats include drainage, burning and construction of further access roads. Improved access to this remote site may increase the risk of accidental fires, agricultural intensification, overgrazing, disturbance, dumping and other damaging activities.

Slieve Rushen Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance and is one of the most intact blanket bogs in Co. Cavan. It supports a good diversity of upland blanket bog microhabitats, including hummocks/hollows systems, pools and quaking areas, as well as several internationally important bird and mammal species. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management.

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