

Site Name: Caha Mountains SAC

Site Code: 000093

The Caha Mountains consist of Old Red Sandstone and form part of the dramatic backbone of the Beara Peninsula, between Turner's Rock (on the Glengarriff-Kenmare Road) and the Healy Pass. Within the site there are a series of peaks and ridges up to 630 m high, radiating out from Caha Mountain itself. The southerly directed ridge forms a broad boggy plateau studded with small lakes - at about 420 m. The area also features glacial valleys and corries, such as the one within which Barley Lake occurs. Generally, the terrain is rocky with many of the slopes featuring rock faces interspersed with grassy shelves. Substantial cliffs are present in the north-western half of the site. The site is of high scientific interest due to the presence of a number of habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, including one priority habitat.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals
- [3160] Dystrophic Lakes
- [4010] Wet Heath
- [4030] Dry Heath
- [4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
- [6230] Species-rich *Nardus* Grassland*
- [7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
- [8110] Siliceous Scree
- [8210] Calcareous Rocky Slopes
- [8220] Siliceous Rocky Slopes
- [1024] Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*)
- [1421] Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*)

The best examples of blanket bog in the site occur on the Glenlough plateau and in the saddle to the east of Knockastumpa. Knockastumpa bog has been described as one of the best saddle bogs in the country, due to its level of intactness, deep peat and wetness, little evidence of erosion, diversity of habitats and diverse flora. Glenlough Bog occupies an undulating plateau sprinkled with small lakes. The terrain is rocky but there are many patches of shallow, flushed peat and occasional ombrotrophic domes on the more even slopes. There are some very wet areas ponded against ridges and on these, scraws have developed. At the east of this area

of bog some of the lakes are surrounded by a *Sphagnum* (bog moss) carpet where the shelter allows it. The bog areas support typical blanket bog vegetation, including the three Sundew species (*Drosera rotundifolia*, *D. anglica* and *D. intermedia*) and Bog Sedge (*Carex limosa*), with several noteworthy mosses (*Sphagnum austinii*, *S. molle*, *S. magellanicum* and *Campylopus shawii*).

Plant species of alpine heath, and the rocky slopes and screes, are associated with the summits and include Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*), Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), St. Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Dwarf Willow (*Salix herbacea*) and Viviparous Fescue (*Festuca vivipara*). Of particular note in these habitats are the following plants, which are considered rare or restricted in their distribution: Recurved Sandwort (*Minuartia recurva*), Wilson's Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum wilsonii*), Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*), and the moss *Cyclodictyon laetevirens*.

Wet heath is frequent at the site and occurs as a mosaic, often in association with blanket bog and upland grassland. The heath is often wet in character and has Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). Heather, Sedges (*Carex* spp.), Rushes (*Juncus* spp.), Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) are also found.

The upland grassland is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) but other grasses present include Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*), *Festuca* spp. and *Agrostis* spp.

Lakes are frequent throughout the site and especially on the Glenlough Mountain plateau. Most of the small lakes which occur within the bog and wet heath habitats are dystrophic in character. These have peat bottoms and often peat-stained water. Plant species are few, with White-beaked Sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and bog mosses being the main species. The larger lakes, including Barley Lake, Glenkeel Lough, Lough Shanoge and Lough Dereenadarodia are typical oligotrophic systems. Plant species found in these lakes include Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), and Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*).

The site contains Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*), a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It also supports the only known population of Recurved Sandwort within Ireland and Britain. Both of these species are listed in the Irish Red Data Book and are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015.

Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*) and Otter, species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, are found within the site. Other important species present within the site include the Irish Hare, Common Lizard and Frog. Brown Trout occurs within some of the lakes of the plateau. These lakes were originally stocked by Lord Bantry in the 19th century but the populations have naturally maintained themselves.

A number of bird species listed in Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive occur: Peregrine Falcon, Hen Harrier and Chough. The Peregrine breeds within the site, while the others probably breed. All these species are listed in the Irish Red Data Book, as is another bird found within the site, the migratory Ring Ouzel.

The main land use within the site is sheep grazing, with over-grazing noticeable on many of the slopes, especially in the western edge of the site. Other land uses are generally small-scale and localised in nature. They include angling, water abstraction, drainage and peat extraction.

This large site is of outstanding scientific interest due to the diverse range of good quality habitats which occur, including blanket bog, heaths, screes, rocky slopes, lakes and grasslands over a range of altitudes. Many rare species of plant and animal occur here, a number of which are legally protected at national and European level.