



Site Name: Fawnboy Bog/Lough Nacung SAC

Site Code: 000140

This site is situated 2 km east of Gweedore and 1.2 km north-west of Dunlewy village in Co. Donegal. It lies at the western foothills of the spectacular Errigal Mountain. Geologically, the site is underlain by metamorphosed limestones and calcareous siltstones which outcrop to the east of the area. Several deep-seated east/west faults cut across the terrain which may act as conduits for base-rich groundwater, accounting for the occurrence of calcicole species in the flora.

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):

[4010] Wet Heath
[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation
[1029] Freshwater Pearl Mussel (<i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>)

The site is of conservation importance primarily for its blanket bog. The bog occurs in association with wet heath, rock outcrop and a number of oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) lakes. The most extensive tract of blanket bog occurs to the east of Lough Nacung where it covers a gently undulating terrain of low ridges, wet slopes and small valleys. The bog expanse is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and low hummocks of the bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. subnitens*. Inter-connecting bog pool systems occur, with typical pool, lawn and hummock communities supporting a wide range of bog mosses (e.g. *S. cuspidatum*, *S. auriculatum*, *S. palustre*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*, *S. subnitens*, *S. magellanicum*, *S. imbricatum* and *S. fuscum*). Vascular plants such as Bog Sedge (*Carex limosa*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Black Bog-rush, Purple Moor-grass, Heather and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) are also found here. The vegetation of the wet lawns and pools, especially where extensive quaking areas occur, is representative of Rhynchosporion, though this habitat can also be found in cutover areas which have not been disturbed for some time.

A number of flush communities are found in association with the bog. One type is dominated by Purple Moor-grass and Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), with Heath Wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora*), Bogbean, Bog-myrtle, Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*) and a dense carpet of mosses such as *S. capillifolium*, *Polytrichum commune*,

Hylocomium splendens and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*. Another more calcareous flush type supports Black Bog-rush, Bog-myrtle, scattered Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and a range of sedges (*C. lasiocarpa*, *C. lepidocarpa*, *C. dioica*, *C. hostiana*, *C. rostrata*, *C. paniculata* and *C. limosa*).

Wet heath occurs on the sloping ground to the east and south of the site where the peat is thin, as well as in small patches throughout the blanket bog. This is usually dominated by Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), although the rare Mackay's Heath (*E. mackaiana*), a Red Data Book species, occurs in abundance amongst heath vegetation along the southern side of Lough Nacung and is dotted throughout the heath away from the lake shore. The hybrid between these species, *E. x stuartii*, also occurs here.

Along the Clady River, and at sections along the margins of Lough Nacung, scrub dominated by gorse (*Ulex* sp.) and willow (*Salix* spp.) occurs in mosaic with wet grassland and patches of bog/heath. Scrub/woodland is also found adjacent to a stream that flows into Lough Nacung, including such species as Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Eared Willow (*S. aurita*) and Gorse (*U. europaeus*). The rare Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) occurs in this wood. Lough Nacung itself is notable for the occurrence of the aquatic plant Pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*), a legally protected plant under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

The site supports a population of Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*), a species listed under Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The site is sometimes used as a feeding ground by the flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose based around Dunfanaghy. Lough Nacung is suitable breeding habitat for the very localised Red-Throated Diver. Both of these birds are Annex I species under the E.U. Birds Directive.

The Irish Hare is present on the site. This species is legally protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976, and is a Red Data Book species.

Land use at the site consists of peat cutting, which may pose a threat to the quality of the blanket bog. Grazing, mainly by sheep, also occurs. An electric power station and dam have been installed between Loughs Nacung Upper and Lower. Small scale quarrying is carried out around the edge of the site. Afforestation is quite extensive outside the site boundary.

In summary, this site is of conservation interest for the occurrence of intact lowland blanket bog, Rhynchosporion vegetation and good quality wet heath. The presence of several notable plant and animal species adds to the value of the site, particularly the Pearl Mussel, Mackay's Heath, Pillwort and Greenland White-fronted Goose.