



Site Name: Meenaguse/Ardbane Bog SAC

Site Code: 000172

This site is situated approximately 9 km north-west of Donegal town and 7 km west of Lough Eske, in the foothills of the Blue Stack Mountains. It is underlain by Carboniferous limestones and shales. The site comprises a complex of highland blanket bog, lakes, flushes, upland acid grassland and heath, and contains several headstreams of the Eany Beg Water and Eany More Water rivers, which flow southward to the sea at Inver Bay. Blanket bog occurs in a mosaic with mesotrophic flush and fen communities in low-lying areas and with acid grassland and heath on the hills.

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):

[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*

Some intact areas of blanket bog, notably at Ardbane, are particularly wet and quaking, with hummocks of bog mosses (*Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. subnitens*, *S. magellanicum* and *S. imbricatum*). There are also inter-hummock flats with Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*); lawns with the bog mosses *Sphagnum auriculatum* var. *auriculatum* and var. *inundatum*; and inter-connecting pools with Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Bog-sedge (*Carex limosa*) and Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*). Flushed areas with Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) are also found at Ardbane. Other similarly wet areas occur in conjunction with flush systems in the vicinity of Meenaguse Lough.

In the drier, upland areas Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Compact Rush (*J. conglomeratus*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Purple Moor-grass and Cottongrass (*Eriophorum* spp.) are frequent. In wetter parts, low hummocks of mosses (principally *Racomitrium languinosum*, occasionally *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *Polytricum commune*) occur.

Areas of upland acid grassland found on the site are dominated by Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Purple Moor-grass, Heath Rush and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*).

A number of regionally scarce plant species occur on the site, including Dioecious Sedge (*Carex dioica*), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum imbricatum*.

Meenaguse/Ardbane Bog is of ornithological importance for the flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose (12-20 individuals in 1994/95) that feed there. It is of particular significance as it is one of the few traditional feeding sites on blanket bog that are still used by the species. Greenland White-fronted Goose is an internationally important Red Data Book species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Sheep grazing and peat cutting are the main activities carried out on the site. Some areas of the site are eroding, while others have been damaged by peat cutting, particularly by mechanical means. Blanket bog on the site is especially vulnerable to continued and expanding mechanised peat extraction. This also threatens the continued presence of Greenland White-fronted Goose on the site, through disturbance and loss of feeding sites. The site is also threatened by afforestation.

Meenaguse/Ardbane Bog is important for the complex of wetland habitats that occur – well-developed highland blanket bog, a habitat listed with priority status, on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and several areas of fens and flushes. Despite recent disturbance by peat cutting, the wet bog areas are still used by a flock of Greenland White-fronted Goose, one of the few remaining sites in the country where the species still feeds on bogland vegetation.