

Site Name: Cloonmoylan Bog SAC

Site Code: 000248

Cloonmoylan Bog is a very large expanse of level raised bog, situated close to the western shore of Lough Derg, near Woodford in Co. Galway. It lies at an altitude of approximately 50 m above sea-level.

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):

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| [7110] Raised Bog (Active)* |
| [7120] Degraded Raised Bog |
| [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation |
| [91D0] Bog Woodland* |

Active raised bog comprises areas of high bog that are wet and actively peat-forming, where the percentage cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is high, and where some or all of the following features occur: hummocks, pools, wet flats, *Sphagnum* lawns, flushes and soaks. Degraded raised bog corresponds to those areas of high bog whose hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration. The Rhynchosporion habitat occurs in wet depressions, pool edges and erosion channels where the vegetation includes White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and/or Brown Beak-sedge (*R. fusca*), and at least some of the following associated species, Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*).

This site contains a large area of good quality, intact active raised bog habitat. The surface displays a typical, undulating pattern of pools, wet channels and low hummocks. A wide variety of bog mosses occur over the surface of the bog, forming hummocks and wet lawns and colonising the pools. The low hummocks are typically colonised by scattered large bushes of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), with abundant Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). Some larger hummocks support Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and a range of mosses. In the very wet areas of active raised bog, Rhynchosporion vegetation is well-developed. These areas contain numerous wet pools and lawns which are typically dominated by the aquatic moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*. Other frequent species of the habitat include *Sphagnum auriculatum*, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), White Beak-sedge, Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). The relatively rare species *Sphagnum pulchrum* and Brown Beak-sedge have been

recorded from wet pool and lawn areas within the site and the presence of these species is noteworthy.

At least half of the surface of the peat dome comprises degraded raised bog. These areas have significantly lower water levels than in adjoining active areas of bog and this results in the presence of a more species-poor peatland flora and a much lower cover of peat-forming *Sphagnum* mosses. The vegetation is generally dominated by more robust bog species such as Deergrass, Common Cottongrass, Heather, Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel and Carnation Sedge.

A wide flush dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) is a prominent feature in the northern half of this site. The flush runs in an east to west direction and there is a distinct central drain (probably natural) in which water flow is evident. In parts of this flush area wet bog woodland occurs, dominated by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), with occasional Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*). Underneath the canopy of Birch, common plant species include Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*), the bog moss *S. capillifolium* and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*). These species are typical of the bog woodland habitat in Ireland.

Raised bogs are vulnerable to turf-cutting and any drain excavation, since these practices affect the hydrology of the bog. Burning is also damaging, causing drying-out of the surface and removal of vegetation.

Cloonmoylan Bog is of high conservation value, due to the large area of good quality raised bog habitats present, notably active raised bog and bog woodland, both of which are listed with priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Raised bogs have largely disappeared from Europe, and in Ireland, are threatened by peat extraction. Habitat diversity on this raised bog is good and the presence of scarce plant species adds to the sites importance.