

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CRIT ISLAND BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 000254

Crit Island Bog NHA is situated approximately 4 km south-west of Ahascragh, mainly in the townlands of Doon Upper, Fairfield, Cloonigny and Killure in County Galway. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The northern margin of the site is bounded by a road, while the other margins are bounded by areas of cutover and grassland.

The high bog consists of two main sections. The larger section, at the north, is elongated and very complex in shape. There are large areas of cutover and forestry associated with it. The southern section is smaller and rectangular in shape, with a large area of coniferous forestry on the high bog. On the northern section there is an area with permanent pools and hummocks/hollows at the western side of the high bog. At the extreme north-west of the site there is a block of rectangular wet semi-natural fields which are situated on the high bog. They are in existence at least since the beginning of the 19th century. There is a flush (Crit Lough) at the centre of the site.

The high bog vegetation at this site is typical of a raised bog, with species such as Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). For ease of description the bog has been divided into 3 areas: the wettest and mostly western section, the central and north-eastern section and the separated southern section. An area of about 20 ha of active bog has been recorded at the western section of the site with hummocks/hollows and pools. In this area, the hummocks are principally composed of bog mosses such as *Sphagnum fuscum*, *S. papillosum* and *S. imbricatum*, and the pools are largely *S. cuspidatum*-filled, with *S. magellanicum* lawns in between. Further east, the hollows become smaller and the pools drier, indicating a lowering of the water level. Much of the rest of this western area is wet, but with Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) becoming dominant. In areas which have not been burned, there is abundant lichen (*Cladonia* spp.) cover which suppresses the bog moss growth. There is also an area of semi-natural wet grassland on the high bog at the extreme north-west of the high bog.

The north-eastern section of this bog is of poor quality, having little in the way of bog moss cover. Instead, it is dominated by Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Bog Asphodel and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*). A number of long, narrow tear-pools which are bog moss-filled and aligned east-west are present east of Crit Lough. Crit Lough is found at the centre of the site and consists of a flush which has been severely damaged by an old drain which flows south and also by the new drains. Abundant Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) occurs on the drying surface of a bog moss carpet. Nearby is a large mound with Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*).

The southern section of this site is quite dry and has been planted with a large block of coniferous forestry.

Current landuse on the site consists of a large amount of peat-cutting around much of the edge of the high bog, and the drainage associated with this. Large portions of the bog have been burnt in the past. There are also large amounts of coniferous forestry on both the high bog and on the cutover. These activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Crit Island Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising as it does a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The area of old reclaimed grassland on the high bog may be of considerable historical and agricultural interest as such areas are very rare. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.

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