

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SLAHENY RIVER BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 000383

Slaheny River Bog NHA is located in south-east Co. Kerry near to the county boundary with Cork. It is situated about 5 km south of Kilgarvan on the Bantry road, some 18 km north of Bantry town, and occurs mainly within the townlands of Gortnaskeagh, Rusheen and Gortacreteen. The site is bounded on its western edge by the Bantry road and on the eastern side by the Slaheny River. It covers an altitude range of between 131 m and 182 m. Bedrock geology is primarily Old Red Sandstone.

The site comprises of a mixture of habitats including upland blanket bog, mixed broad-leaved woodland, grazed and abandoned fields and riverside vegetation. There are also areas of dry lowland grassland and upland grassland on a peaty soil recorded within the site.

Blanket bog, situated in a valley bottom, has been somewhat modified in its species composition through burning and grazing and much of the vegetation is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Underfoot, the ground is soft with occasional bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), with some cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and a low cover of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). A few remaining pools have been colonised by bog mosses and, in the south-west of the site, an area of old cutover bog is regenerating well with shallow pools infilling with bog mosses and Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*). The Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) is recorded at the site.

Broad-leaved mixed woodland, dominated by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), occurs along the upper slopes of the site, by the Bantry road, and adjacent to the Slaheny River. Woodland adjacent to the riverbanks and streams includes Downy Birch as well as Willow (*Salix* spp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). The ground vegetation in these areas is often very tall with large tussocks of Purple Moor-grass and shrubs of Bog-myrtle. Wet heath occurs on the thinner peat areas and supports Bog-myrtle, Purple Moor-grass and Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*).

Currently the site is used mainly for grazing livestock. Damaging activities associated with grazing include burning of the bog and trampling by sheep. These activities are likely to have contributed to changes in species composition and loss of habitat (hummock and hollow systems). Further damage to the site may pose a threat to its conservation potential.

Slaheny River Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management.

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