

Site Name: Carlingford Mountain SAC

Site Code: 000453

The only upland area in Co. Louth, the Carlingford Mountain range consists of an inverted 'Y' shaped ridge of dolerite forming the rugged backbone of the Carlingford Peninsula. Granite, slates and gabbro also contribute to the geology of the area. The Carlingford Mountain site comprises two main blocks - one northern, from Anglesey Mountain to Carnavaddy, and one southern, centred around Carlingford Mountain itself. The two blocks are linked at the Windy Gap.

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
[4030] Dry Heath
[4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
[6230] Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> Grassland*
[7140] Transition Mires
[7230] Alkaline Fens
[8110] Siliceous Scree
[8210] Calcareous Rocky Slopes
[8220] Siliceous Rocky Slopes

Generally the vegetation this site is a mosaic of wet and dry heaths, acidic grassland, with some areas of transition mire and alkaline fen. The sloping acidic grassland on mineral soils is dominated by Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), with much Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*). Other species such as Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Tormenitil (*Potentilla erecta*) tend to be more frequent on the lower slopes. The heath is dominated by Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), with a little Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and, in the wetter areas, Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). At higher altitudes the heath grades into alpine heath and mountain blanket bog, the latter dominated by Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). The comparatively low rainfall here is not particularly conducive to blanket peat accumulation.

Numerous flushes and small streams add to the diversity of the site with species such as Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), butterworts (*Pinguicula* spp.), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) occurring. The presence of gabbro leads to some local base enrichment, resulting in many of the flushes being characterised by Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). In drier areas, species such as

Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) indicate this enrichment.

A number of alpine species (e.g. Roseroot, *Rhodiola rosea*, Dwarf Willow, *Salix herbacea*, Beech Fern, *Phegopteris connectilis* and Wilson's Filmy-fern, *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*) have been recorded from the site. Red Listed bryophytes recorded from the site include *Campylopus subulatus*, *Hedwigia integrifolia* and *Pogonatum nanum*.

The rocky exposed areas of the summit ridge have a sparse cover of the species dominant in the grassland and heath found at lower levels. Species such as Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) are also present, and the ridge provides an unusual location for the woodland species Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*).

Patches of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) occur along the northern side, an area from which the Red Data Book species Parsley Fern (*Cryptogramma crispa*) has been recorded. This species is characteristic of the E.U. Annex I habitat 'siliceous scree' and is legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015.

Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) infests large areas of the lower slopes and in dense patches it grows to the virtual exclusion of other species. Further spread of this species should be prevented.

A pair of Peregrine, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, are resident in the area.

This site is important for the presence of nine habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Moreover, Carlingford Mountain is notable for the occurrence of certain alpine plants, including the rare Parsley Fern, several Red List bryophytes and for the presence of Peregrine Falcon.