

Site Name: Bellacorick Iron Flush SAC

Site Code: 000466

The Bellacorick Iron Flush is situated about 7 km north-east of Bellacorick Co. Mayo, on the headwaters of the Sruffaunnamuingabatia, a tributary of the Oweniny River. The site contains a small minerotrophic fen developed on glacial till overlying calcareous sandstone. The entire site is surrounded by drains and extensive areas of mechanically-cut peat.

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):

[1528] Marsh Saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>)
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The Marsh Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*), a species protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, and listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, occurs in the site. The rare mosses *Homalothecium nitens* and *Meesia triquetra* have also been recorded from this site, although recent studies suggest that *Meesia triquetra*, at its only recorded station in Britain and Ireland, appears to have become extinct. The cause is thought to be the loss of suitable wet habitats through drainage.

Extensive areas of the site are now dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) occurring. The Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is found in wetter areas.

Typical blanket bog vegetation occurs in the non-flushed areas of the site, i.e. with Purple Moor-grass, Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*). Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) occurs throughout the site and in places supports a diverse community of lichens.

The continued survival of this habitat, and the species which occur there, is threatened by the lack of grazing, the drainage and peat-cutting activities occurring around the site, and the resultant development towards rank grassland and scrub. Bellacorick Iron Flush is, nevertheless, of considerable interest, both in terms of the rich-flush habitat, which is uncommon outside of the north Mayo region in Ireland, and because of the presence of rare plant species.