

Site Name: Corraun Plateau SAC

Site Code: 000485

The site is situated on the Corraun Peninsula to the south-east of Achill Island, Co. Mayo. The geology at the site is varied: the area around Mallaranny is underlain by Dalradian schists, Corraun Mountain is underlain by Dalradian schists and quartzites, while the southern coastal section is underlain by Old Red Sandstone. The site rises from sea level at its southern boundary to 542 m O.D. at Corraun Hill on the summit plateau, and to 541 m O.D. above Lough Cullydoo. The site is dominated by heath-type vegetation, in combination with pockets of peat and rock and a scattering of small lakes. Because the site is bounded to the south by the sea, it displays an interesting range of habitats in a continuum from shore to mountain summit.

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
[5130] Juniper Scrub
[8110] Siliceous Scree
[8220] Siliceous Rocky Slopes

Wet heath and dry heath are the dominant habitats at this site. Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) is frequent throughout, while Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) are the species most associated with the wetter areas. The dry heath is found on the steeper slopes where soils are drier and more shallow. Here, species such as Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) are common, and in places Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is found. Alpine heath and Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)-dominated areas occur on the very steep slopes and at the higher altitudes. Characteristic species found in these areas include Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Juniper, Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) and a variety of bryophytes typical of alpine situations, including *Adelanthus lindenbergianus* and *Dicranodontium unciatum*.

A variety of blanket bog types are present at the site. The upland blanket bog on Corraun Plateau has been heavily grazed and now has more of a heath character, with a virtual absence of pools and hummocks. A good range of lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) has been recorded here, including the relatively rare *C. rangiferina*. There is a

small area of plateau bog at approximately 270 m O.D., between the headwaters of two rivers. This is relatively intact and is dominated by Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bog Asphodel and Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). Other species present include bog mosses (e.g. *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and *S. recurvum*) and the liverwort, *Pleurozia purpurea*. The extent of blanket bog at lower altitudes has been reduced by grazing and turf-cutting. However, there are still pockets of blanket bog where such species as White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) are to be found. Oligotrophic lakes occur in association with the blanket bog towards the northern side of the site.

Rocky ground within the site, including silicious scree and rocky slopes, supports a variety of plant species, including Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), Bilberry, Viviparous Fescue (*Festuca vivipara*), St Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*) and Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*). Several rare bryophytes are known within the site, including *Adelanthus lindenbergianus* and *Molendia warburgii*, but protected under the Flora (Protection Order) 2015, and the latter at its only known locality in Ireland.

Other habitats present on the site include deciduous woodland, saltmarsh, sea cliffs, rivers, streams and boulder beaches. Woodland at the eastern side of the site in the vicinity of the railway line includes both naturally-occurring and planted tree species, e.g. Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*). The woodland supports a rich ground flora of vascular plants and bryophytes.

A small patch of wet woodland occurs close to the eastern shore of Bellacragher Bay. This is dominated by Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and willows (*Salix* spp.), with a ground flora composed of such species as Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Starwort (*Callitriche* sp.), Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*).

Saltmarsh occurs at the edge of Bellacragher Bay. It supports such plant species as Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), as well as several species of algae.

The rare Red Data Book plant species Alpine Saw-wort (*Saussurea alpina*) occurs on cliffs within the site. The site also supports a large population of Irish Heath (*Erica erigena*), a species which is confined to Mayo and Galway; its only other known sites are in Spain, Portugal and France.

Fauna species of note which occur at the site include Irish Hare, Irish Stoat, Common Frog and Lizard. Woodland on the site supports typical woodland bird communities, and such species as Goldcrest, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Tree Creeper, Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Warbler are found.

The main land uses at the site are sheep grazing and turf-cutting. These activities have a critical impact on blanket bog, heath and grassland habitats. Some areas of heath are being colonised by Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), an alien invasive species.

The site is of considerable conservation significance, primarily for the presence of good examples of six habitats that are listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive; the presence of populations of several rare or scarce plant species is notable also.