

Site Name: Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC

Site Code: 000500

This large site is situated in the extreme north-west of Co. Mayo, where the climate is wet oceanic, and gales from the Atlantic are frequent. This area is underlain by metamorphic rocks, comprising mainly schists and quartzites of Moinian age. From sea-level, the site reaches 379 m O.D. at Maumakeogh. The soils are predominantly peats, with underlying glacial tills usually only visible along water channels and roads. Four main river systems drain the site: the Glenamoy, the Muingnabo, the Belderg and the Glenglassra Rivers. One medium-sized lake, Lougherglass, occurs on the site.

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):

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| [1230] Vegetated Sea Cliffs |
| [21A0] Machairs* |
| [3160] Dystrophic Lakes |
| [4010] Wet Heath |
| [5130] Juniper Scrub |
| [7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)* |
| [7140] Transition Mires |
| [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation |
| [1106] Atlantic Salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>) |
| [1393] Slender Green Feather-moss (<i>Drepanocladus vernicosus</i>) |
| [1395] Petalwort (<i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>) |
| [1528] Marsh Saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>) |

Blanket bog, a priority habitat under Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, dominates the site. Glenamoy Bog is a prime example of the extreme oceanic form of lowland blanket bog and is one of the most extensive tracts of bog in the country. The bog occupies a gently undulating plain, but extends uphill to cover the slopes of Maumakeogh and Benmore in the eastern sector of the site, and northward, out toward the sea cliffs of the north-west Mayo coastline. Peat depth reaches 6 m in the low-lying areas. A large flush occurs at Rathavisteen, which supports species-rich vegetation, including Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and the moss *Tomentypnum nitens* which is nationally rare. Marsh Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*), listed under Annex II of the Habitats Directive and also on the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, is

found in another flush area in Barroosky and at a flush near Ballycastle. This is an extremely rare plant in Ireland, only known from Co. Mayo. Five other Annexed habitats occur in close association with the blanket bog - dystrophic lakes, wet heath, Juniper heath, Rhynchosporion depressions and transition mires.

Dystrophic lakes and pools, which lie in peaty basins and have peat-stained water, are a common feature of lowland blanket bog. Some larger lakes also occur, the largest being Lougherglass. At Glenamoy, the lakes/pools are particularly well-developed. The pools vary in size, some up to 150m², and range from 0.3 to 2 m deep. The larger pools contain Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*), Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), and sometimes Floating Bur-reed (*Sparganium angustifolium*) and the bog mosses *S. auriculatum* and *S. cuspidatum*.

Juniper (*Juniperus communis* subsp. *nana*) occurs scattered over the blanket bog, often on islands in pools or lakes, and often in association with Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and hummocks formed of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*. On steep slopes where the peat is shallow, the blanket bog grades into wet heath. Here, Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) are found. Where the heath is drier, and especially towards the northern coastal zone of the site, scattered Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) occurs with Heather and Juniper.

Transition mires or quaking bogs occur where the bog vegetation merges with flush type vegetation influenced by base enrichment, and also at the interface between large pools/small lakes and adjacent blanket bog. The vegetation is characterised by lawns of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), with abundant small sedges (especially *Carex limosa*, *C. paniculata*, *C. rostrata* and *C. lepidocarpa*), Bogbean and White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). Diagnostic bryophytes (other than *Sphagnum*) include *Aneura pinguis*, *Scorpidium revolvens* and *Calliergon giganteum*.

Rhynchosporion vegetation is best represented around pool margins and in wet hollows, and is often a component of transition mires. *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum* are the principal moss species associated with this habitat, with a relatively low diversity of vascular plants: White Beak-sedge, Bogbean, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Purple Moor-grass and sundews (*Drosera* spp.). The rare Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora fusca*) is found in some of the pools and lawns.

A rare moss, *Drepanocladus vernicosus*, has been recorded from an area of poor fen habitat within the blanket bog complex. This is only one of 11 known sites for the plant in Ireland. This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. As mentioned above, two populations of another Annex II species, Marsh Saxifrage, occur within the site.

The coastal habitats at Glenamoy are extensive and varied. Sea cliffs extend for about 20 km along the north coast and achieve a height of 253 m, at Benwee Head. They vary in physical character from sheer cliff-face to slopes of varying gradients. Typical

cliff-face vegetation includes Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*). Sea stacks and several islands occur, of which Illaunmaistir is the most notable. A feature of the cliffs is the well-developed cliff-top vegetation, which ranges from typical Plantain-dominated vegetation (*Plantago* sward) to coastal heath. South of Benwee Head, the rocky coastline grades into an estuarine system, Sruwaddacon Bay, which contains sand dunes and a machair system. Machair is a form of sandy, flat, coastal grassland, and this particular machair is unusual in that it extends upslope at Garter Hill. It is, however, now very degraded owing mainly to over-grazing by sheep, and there is widespread erosion. Petalwort (*Petallophyllum ralfsii*), a rare bryophyte, listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, occurs abundantly on the machair habitat. This is thought to be the second largest colony (after Slyne Head in Co. Galway) of this species in Ireland.

The sea cliffs and islands provide excellent habitat for breeding seabirds. An internationally important population of Storm Petrel (7,500 - 10,000 pairs, pre-1987) occurs on Illaunmaistir. A large Puffin colony (approx. 2,000 pairs, pre-1987) and a small colony of Manx Shearwaters (*c.* 100 pairs) also occurs on Illaunmaistir. The mainland cliff was the first breeding site in Ireland for Fulmar, and now has a very substantial colony (approx. 2,000 pairs, pre-1987). There is a sizeable Kittiwake colony (approx. 400 pairs pre-1987), and small colonies of Guillemots and Razorbills (less than 100 individuals of each). Peregrine and Chough, both Annex I E.U. Bird Directive species, breed on the cliffs. Another Annex I species, Merlin, breeds on the blanket bog, as does Golden Plover. In winter, a small flock (less than 50 individuals) of Barnacle Goose visit Illaunmaistir and Kid Island.

Otter, an E.U. Habitats Directive Annex II species, occurs on the site, as well as two other Red Data Book mammal species: Badger and Irish Hare. The Glenamoy River is predominantly a western, acidic, spate river which has a valuable late run of salmon (*Salmo salar*) in July, with good spawning habitats and good water quality. Sea Trout are also found.

A number of land use practices have damaged parts of this site. Grazing by sheep and cattle is widespread, and over-grazing, which leads to soil erosion, has caused damage to parts of the blanket bog, heath and machair habitats. Peat cutting, by hand and to a lesser extent by mechanised means, is widespread throughout, though mostly confined to near roads and tracks. The region in general has been heavily afforested with conifers and much of the site is bounded by plantations.

This site is of immense ecological importance because of the presence of a number of E.U. Annex I habitats, including two priority habitats - blanket bog and machair. It supports populations of Habitats Directive -listed plant and animal species, as well as six Annex I Birds Directive species. It also has nationally important populations of other seabirds. Despite serious damage to parts of the site in recent years, large areas remain in good condition. Considerable archaeological interest is contained within the site, including the renowned Céide Fields. Furthermore, the site is of outstanding scenic value.