

**Site Name: Lough Gall Bog SAC**

**Site Code: 000522**

Lough Gall Bog is on a low-lying peninsula on the western side of Bellacragher Bay, a sheltered sea inlet in north-west Co. Mayo. It is a relatively small area of lowland blanket bog, with a good diversity of features typical of the habitat, i.e. hummock and hollow areas, pool systems, streams, flushes, lakes, swallow-holes, islands and natural drains. It is surrounded by the sea to the north, east and south, giving rise to an unusual and natural transition from blanket bog vegetation to saltmarsh and shingle beach.

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):

[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)* [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation
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The bog vegetation includes Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). In places, well-defined hummocks are scattered over the bog surface, formed of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp., including *S. imbricatum*). Intervening wet channels or hollows are colonised by Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). Peaty pools occur, some of which are infilling with bog mosses (including *S. cuspidatum* and *S. magellanicum*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Flushes on the bog surface add habitat diversity: some are very wet and have a floating mat (scraw) of vegetation composed of bog mosses (including *S. cuspidatum*), Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) and Bogbean. The various species of the wet areas, and especially White Beak-sedge, Bogbean, Great Sundew and bog mosses, are characteristic of depressions on peat substrates (Rhynchosporion).

A number of scarce plant species occur on Lough Gall Bog. Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and Irish Heath (*Erica erigena*) are found in flushed areas. Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) grows on islands within bog pools.

An area of saltmarsh occurs at the north-western end of the site and includes Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and glasswort (*Salicornia* sp.).

The Marsh Clubmoss (*Lycopodiella inundata*), a species listed in the Red Data Book and on the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, is also found at the site.

The site provides breeding habitat for Otter: this species is protected in Ireland and is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Lough Gall Bog is currently largely hydrologically intact, with most of the central and eastern part in an undisturbed condition, not damaged by grazing and with intact peat margins. However, the bog is used for peat-cutting, both by hand and by machine. These practices, particularly the latter, threaten bog habitats since they upset their sensitive hydrology. The bog is also used for grazing, which can also threaten the site if not controlled.

Lough Gall Bog is an excellent example of a western lowland blanket bog, with Rhynchosporion vegetation also well represented. The rarity of this habitat type in Europe is recognised in the priority status assigned to active blanket bogs on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Lough Gall has good habitat diversity and an interesting flora. The intact nature of the bog, and the unusual transition from bog to coastal habitats, makes this site of considerable conservation value.