

**Site Name: Ferbane Bog SAC**

**Site Code: 000575**

Ferbane Bog is a relatively large, domed, raised bog located about 10 km east of Shannonbridge in Co. Offaly. It is underlain by low permeability Waulsortian limestone and clay-rich tills.

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):

[7110] Raised Bog (Active)*
[7120] Degraded Raised Bog
[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation

Active raised bog comprises areas of high bog that are wet and actively peat-forming, where the percentage cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is high, and where some or all of the following features occur: hummocks, pools, wet flats, *Sphagnum* lawns, flushes and soaks. Degraded raised bog corresponds to those areas of high bog where hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration. The Rhynchosporion habitat occurs in wet depressions, pool edges and erosion channels where the vegetation includes White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and/or Brown Beak-sedge (*R. fusca*), and at least some of the following associated species: Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*).

Much of the surface of the bog is very wet and spongy and the cover of bog mosses and lichens is generally high. A wet, quaking area to the east occurs in a depression and is characterised by a dominant growth of Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), while another very wet quaking area on the western side of the site has well-developed inter-connecting pools. It is in these wettest portions of the high bog that Rhynchosporion vegetation is best developed. Here there are extensive lawns of *Sphagnum magellanicum* and *S. cuspidatum*, accompanied by vascular plant species such as White Beak-sedge, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Lawns of *S. magellanicum* and hummocks of *S. papillosum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. imbricatum* occur in slightly drier areas surrounding these wettest zones. Carnation Sedge is present in abundance throughout the site, but particularly so on sloping areas. Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) occur in scattered patches throughout the bog. Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) are also found. A flushed area occurs on the northern part of the site.

Degraded raised bog occurs on the drier margins of the high bog dome. The vegetation is typical of degraded raised bog habitat in Ireland, with more robust species such as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass, Carnation Sedge, Bog Asphodel and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) tending to predominate. Along the driest margins of the high bog there is invasion by shrub species such as Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). *Sphagnum* cover is low in degraded areas of raised bog, typically covering less than 30% of the ground, and conversely the cover of lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) tends to be locally high.

The vegetation of the older cut-away areas to the west, north and east of the site is dominated by Downy Birch and Gorse, with areas of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), willow (*Salix* sp.), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Scots Pine and Rhododendron also found.

Drainage is extensive at this site and has caused significant drying out. Past peat-cutting and some active peat-cutting have also speeded up water loss. However, although the high bog has suffered some water loss, it is still in restorable condition.

Ferbane Bog is a good example of a raised bog and is of considerable conservation significance. Active raised bogs are becoming increasingly rare in Ireland, and Europe, and are listed as a priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.