



Site Name: Cloonchambers Bog SAC

Site Code: 000600

Cloonchambers Bog is a large, relatively intact, undulating bog which lies north of the Ballinlough to Castlerea road, and about 6 km west of Castlerea town in Co. Roscommon. It consists of two elongated peat-filled basins, separated by a strip of grassy, fen vegetation, found where thinner peat merges with mineral soil.

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 whose 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*).

At Cloonchambers Bog the area of active raised bog occurs in only a relatively small, wet part of the high bog surface. It is, however, well-developed and includes examples of Rhynchosporion vegetation. Small pool systems occur in the active areas and many are colonised by the bog moss *S. cuspidatum*, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), White Beak-sedge, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and Bog Asphodel.

Much of the uncut high bog surface at Cloonchambers is classified as degraded raised bog. Due to the effects of peripheral drainage and burning, most of the degraded bog habitat is in a rather dry state and thus the vegetation is dominated by varying mixtures of either Carnation Sedge and/or Bog Asphodel. Other frequent vascular plant species include Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica*

tetralix), Deergrass and the cottongrasses *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *E. vaginatum*. In flushed areas, which occur in sloping parts with a rather shallow peat cover, species such as Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) are locally dominant. *Sphagnum* cover is typically low in degraded areas and rarely exceeds 30% cover. A feature of the degraded raised bog at this site is the numerous areas of erosion channels and gullies which occur as a result of the rather steep slopes on the surface of much of this bog.

Species occurring in the fen between the two peat basins include Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Purple Moor-grass and Bog-myrtle.

An unusual feature on Cloonchambers Bog is the woodland which has developed on dry, heathery ridges in the north-eastern section. Trees found here include Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) are also found here, the latter a species which is generally scarce in Ireland.

The site includes an area of cutover bog, part of which is now improved grassland.

Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*, Order Lepidoptera), a butterfly listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, has been recorded from the site, but in its present condition the habitat is only marginally suitable for the species and any populations present are likely to be intermittent, small and short-lived. Natural and human-induced changes are likely to make the habitat less suitable in the future.

The structure of much of the high bog is poor due to the prolonged effects of drainage, associated with peat cutting, and possibly also burning. However, peat-cutting has now been largely discontinued.

Cloonchambers Bog is of high conservation value as it is a good example of a western raised bog that contains areas of active raised bog, degraded raised bog and Rhynchosporion vegetation. The presence of an extensive flushed fen area on the high bog surface is a very rare feature of Irish raised bogs and is thus of considerable ecological and eco-hydrological interest. Of particular botanical interest is the presence of *Vaccinium vitis-idea*, a rare plant species usually associated with montane heath habitats in the west and north of Ireland.