

Site Name: Lough Hoe Bog SAC

Site Code: 000633

Lough Hoe Bog is an extensive area of undulating montane blanket bog and heath-covered rocky ridges on a lake-studded plateau in the Ox (Slieve Gamph) Mountains. It straddles the Mayo/Sligo county boundary. The underlying geology is of granite, gneiss and schist. The northern boundary of the site encompasses Lough Talt on the Tobercurry to Ballina Road, which is 13 km from Tobercurry and 17 km from Ballina.

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):

- [3110] Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals
- [7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
- [1013] Geyer's Whorl Snail (*Vertigo geyeri*)
- [1092] White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*)

The plateau top is covered by a thin layer of blanket bog with areas of shallow inter-connecting pools. Hummocks are large and are formed from the mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). The pools contain the bog moss *S. auriculatum*, Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). In the drier areas, Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*E. vaginatum*) are abundant. In places, blanket bog grades into wet heath vegetation, while dry heath occurs on some of the steeper slopes and rocky outcrops.

There are numerous oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) lakes found on the site. Plant species colonising these lakes include Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and rushes (*Juncus bulbosus* and *J. effusus*), amongst others. The rocky lake shores are frequently colonised by Common Yellow-sedge (*Carex demissa*) and wood-rush (*Luzula* sp.). Floating mats of vegetation, consisting mainly of Bogbean and Bog Pondweed have developed at the ends of some lakes, while Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) are the main emergent species at the lake edges.

There are three large rivers on the site, two in the south and the third to the north - the Lough Hoe River. Species commonly occurring by these rivers include Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*). To the south of the river flowing from Lough Hoe

is an area with numerous hollows, 5-10 m in diameter. These areas are dominated by Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*). At the southern end of Lough Nalackagh there are areas of poorly developed inter-connecting pools, while another such pool system is found towards the north-west of the same lake.

The rare Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) has been recorded from near Lough Talt, but it has not been seen there in recent years.

The wetland snail, *Vertigo geyeri*, occurs in marsh vegetation on the shore on Lough Talt. This is a very rare, glacial relict species which is known in Ireland from only a small number of sites. It is rare and threatened in Europe and is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The presence in Lough Talt of a population of White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), a species also listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive is also notable. Lough Talt also supports a population of the rare and threatened Red Data Book fish species, Arctic Char.

An island in the lake formerly held a mixed colony of Common Gulls and Black-headed Gulls (46 and 280 individuals, respectively, in 1977/78). By 1992 this colony had all but disappeared, with only 4 pairs of the former species remaining.

Grazing (by cattle and sheep) and turbarry are the major land use activities in evidence on the site. Lough Hoe Bog is particularly vulnerable to afforestation, turbarry and over-stocking. Despite some localised peat erosion and evidence of over-stocking, most of the site is relatively intact.

Lough Hoe Bog contains a large area of good quality blanket bog, a habitat that is becoming increasingly rare in Ireland. The site also contains good quality examples of oligotrophic lakes. Both of these habitats are listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The presence of several rare species, and in particular the E.U. Habitats Directive Annex II listed *Vertigo geyeri* and *Austropotamobius pallipes*, adds to the conservation significance of the site.