

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: RINN RIVER NHA

SITE CODE: 000691

The Rinn River flows from Lough Rinn in Co. Leitrim, to Lough Forbes, Co. Longford. Several sections of undrained river meadows, known as callows, between Annaveagh Bridge and Lough Forbes are liable to flood and form the basis of the NHA. Rinn River NHA is located 4 km east of Roosky, Co. Longford. The site extends for 9 km on both sides of the river and is situated in the townlands of Clooncarreen, Tooman, Bellageeher, Knockadrinan, Clooncumber and Cloonmorris in Co. Leitrim and the townlands of Cloonageeher, Cloonart North and Cloonart South in Co. Longford. Annaghcooleen Bog, which lies at the confluence of the Rinn River and Lough Forbes Complex candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC), is included within this NHA. It is situated in the townlands of Annaghcooleen and Currygranny Co. Longford.

The main habitat in the site is wet grassland on the floodplains of the Rinn River. These wet meadows are subject to prolonged flooding in winter and early spring and freshwater marsh occurs at the river margins. At Bellageeher the site incorporates a small fairly dry lowland raised bog. This consists of a small dome of high bog with associated cutover and lies on the western bank of the Rinn River. It can be accessed from a road to the west. To the south-east of the site at Annaghcooleen, an extensive area of raised bog in the site has areas of high bog and cutover. The high bog is divided into two sections by the Dublin-Ballina railway line and there is cutover on all margins. This bog can be accessed from a bog track to the south-east.

Where the wet grassland has not been improved for agriculture the main species present are Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) along with Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and other grass species such as Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*). In places the ground is wet enough to support freshwater marsh and it is dominated by tall sedges such as Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) with Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). The species present depend not only upon the hydrological conditions, but also upon management. Areas improved for agriculture, by fertilisation, include species such as Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) and Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*).

At Bellageeher, there is a small dry raised bog dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) with Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). The characteristic species, Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) is also present. Bog moss hummocks are poorly-developed and there are few pools.

Annaghcooleen bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, with such species as Ling Heather, Cross-leaved Heath, Deergrass and Bog Asphodel. It has been damaged by fire with the marginal areas being dry and generally dominated by Ling Heather and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.). Some bog moss regeneration of *Sphagnum magellanicum* and *S. papillosum* has been recorded in parts, but there is bare ground and poor hummock/hollow development. An isolated area to the north-west is unburnt and wetter with, well-developed *Sphagnum* hummocks, including the relatively scarce *S. imbricatum* and *S. fuscum*. There are also small algal pools with some *S. cuspidatum* present. Elsewhere, hollows with algae and some *S. cuspidatum* occur, but pools are absent apart from long tear pools to the south-east. A small flush with Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) occurs to the south of the bog.

At Bellageeher there is no active peat-cutting and old cutover, colonised by Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), occurs to the west of the high bog. Ling Heather and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) are also present and there is scattered birch (*Betula* sp.). To the east and south, there appears to be a semi-natural margin beside the river with high bog grading into wet grassland on the bank of the Rinn River. The cutover to the north has been reclaimed for agriculture. At Annaghcooleen there is active cutover to the east. To the north there is old cutover, which has Birch scrub encroachment.

The site is important for wildfowl and the E.U. Birds Directive Annex I species, Greenland White-fronted Goose, over-winters in the wetlands and occasionally uses the bog for refuge and foraging. The Republic of Ireland holds about 50% of the world population of this bird in the winter, and has international obligations to protect it, and habitats it uses. Other species using the site include Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Pochard, Lapwing and Curlew.

Current landuse on the site consists of grazing of the wet meadow, dredging of the river and peat-cutting at Annaghcooleen. Damaging activities associated with this landuse include drainage and burning. There has been no recent drainage on either of the high bogs, but there is extensive drainage at Annaghcooleen associated with the railway line and active peat-cutting. There is also evidence of recent burning. These are all activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological integrity of the high bog, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

The close proximity to the River Shannon Callows and Lough Forbes Complex SACs increases the ecological interest and scientific value of the site. Flooding callows are a valuable national wildlife asset. The Rinn River is not only of interest in itself, but it provides a corridor for the movement of plants and animals between Lough Rinn (also an NHA) and Lough Forbes. Rinn River NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance, including as it does, a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The bogs in the site support a diversity of raised bog microhabitats including some hummock/hollow complexes and tear pools. There is also a semi-natural margin between Rinn River and Ballageeher Bog, which is of ecological importance. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.

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