

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: SCREGGAN BOG**

**SITE CODE: 000921**

Screggan Bog NHA is situated approximately 7km south-west of Tullamore, mainly in the townlands of Ross and Killurin in County Offaly. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The Clodiagh River flows at the east of the site, and Pallas Lough bounds the site at the west, while the other margins are bounded by areas of cutover, woodland and grassland.

Screggan Bog consists of three main sections divided by roads and tracks. There are areas with occasional small pools, and some poorly developed hummock/hollow systems in the largest section. Much of the bog is quite dry due to drainage and peat-cutting at the margin. An unusual feature is the extensive colonisation of its south-east portion by Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). There are large areas of coniferous forestry on the cutover areas of the site, along with areas of deciduous woodland and scrub.

The high bog at Screggan shows features typical of a Midland Raised Bog. The bog surface is soft and wet in places, and is largely comprised of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) including two notable hummock-forming species *S. imbricatum* and *S. fuscum*. *S. papillosum*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. tenellum*, *S. auriculatum* and *S. cuspidatum* are also found. The hummocks are colonised by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). In the wet channels between hummocks Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) are common. Around the margin of the high bog a range of habitats which have developed on the cutover areas. Frequently, the flat cutover surface is covered by Ling Heather and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). In some places it has been colonised by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Scot's Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). The understorey often contains Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), amongst others. There are areas of grassland with species such as Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*).

At the western end of the site there is a flooded area with species-rich marsh vegetation. Plants recorded here include rushes (*Juncus* spp.), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), and Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*). There are also some plants here which are indicative of fen conditions, namely Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*). At the eastern edge of the site there are areas of woodland, the easternmost being a satellite of the main Screggan Bog site. These woodlands consist of commercial conifer plantations surrounded by an area of scrub woodland containing several plant species of high scientific interest, notably two Red Data

Book species, Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) and Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*). There is also an excellent diversity of other native trees and shrubs occurring including Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*), willows (*Salix* spp.), Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

Current landuse on the site consists of peat-cutting around much of the eastern edge of the high bog, and the drainage associated with this. Large portions of the bog have been severely burnt in the past. Significant areas of cutover bog have been drained, cleared and reclaimed for agricultural purposes. There are also considerable amounts of coniferous forestry on the cutover at the north-east of the site. These activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Screggan Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising 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. 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.