

Site Name: Silvermine Mountains SAC

Site Code: 000939

This small site is situated on the northern slopes of the Silvermine Mountains, 1 km south-east of Silvermines village in Co. Tipperary. It slopes steeply uphill from 240 m in the north-west corner to 400 m at the southern boundary. The geology of the area is sandstone of different ages - older Silurian on the central part of the mountain, while the outer parts are composed of yellowish and red sandstones of Devonian age.

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):

[4010] Wet Heath [6230] Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> Grassland*

The site supports species-rich *Nardus* grasslands on siliceous substrates. This grassland occurs in two separate locations on either side of the road which cuts through the site. Typical species associated with the habitat and recorded at the site include Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Lesser Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*), Greater Butterfly-orchid (*P. chlorantha*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Small-white Orchid (*Pseudorchis albida*).

Heath is the most extensive habitat of the site and is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), and occurs mainly on peaty soils. Localised, flushed, wet areas dominated by rushes (*Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus*), with Marsh Arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) and Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) are also present.

Scrub vegetation dominated by Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), and grading into Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), is well developed in the more inaccessible areas, such as the gullies at the western edge of the site. In places it encroaches on to grassland, probably due to under-grazing. Dense Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is also present.

Red Grouse is known from the site, as well as the Irish Hare, Common Frog and Common Lizard.

The occurrence of the Small-white Orchid at this site is of particular note as it is a Red Data Book species which is legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

Land use within the site is confined to low density grazing by cattle, sheep and perhaps horses.

This site is of conservation importance due to the presence of two habitats listed in Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, namely wet heath and species-rich *Nardus* grassland, the latter being listed with priority status. The occurrence of the rare Small-white Orchid adds significantly to the value of the site.