



Site Name: Corratirrim SAC

Site Code: 000979

In the north-west of Co. Cavan, Carboniferous limestone underlies the shales and grits that form the Cuilcagh range. At Corratirrim, on the border with Co. Fermanagh and approximately 2 km south of Belcoo, the limestone outcrops at the surface. Here, the land consists of grassy slopes, small cliffs, patches of limestone pavement and scrub.

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):

[8240] Limestone Pavement*

Limestone pavement, particularly where it occurs around the centre of the site, consists of clints and grykes up to a depth of approximately 18 inches. Some areas of shattered pavement are also present. Moss and lichen species, such as *Ctenidium molluscum* and *Rhizocarpon badioatrum*, are common. Fern species have established, though not with the vigour and variety seen in the Burren in Co. Clare. Species present include Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes*) and the relatively rare Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*). Vascular plant species present include Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*), Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*), Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*), abundant Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and low-growing/grazed Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). Yew (*Taxus baccata*) is found on pavement on the eastern slopes.

The eastern and north-western slopes of the site consist of rocky outcrops surrounded by a mossy heath type grassland with both calcicole and calcifuge species co-existing. Species present include Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Wild Thyme, eyebrights (*Euphrasia* spp.) and Quaking-grass (*Briza media*).

On the western and southern slopes, and at the far east of the site, a heath vegetation occurs with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) as dominants, and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Tormentil also occurring. Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria albicans*), although occurring throughout, is especially common where the soil cover is thin over the limestone. Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium*

saxatile) and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) are also found in grassy patches between the heathers. The rare Small-white Orchid (*Pseudorchis albida*) is found on the steep south-west facing slope in the limestone uplands. This is a protected species under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999. At the centre east of the site the heath is dominated by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

At the base of the slopes, where conditions are wetter, bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) are found along with Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), occasional Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), horsetails (*Equisetum* spp.) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).

Throughout the site grazing by sheep and cattle is carried out which generally prevents the spread of scrub.

Corratirrim is a varied site and is of particular ecological interest for the occurrence of limestone pavement, a habitat mainly associated with Counties Clare and Galway, and not known from elsewhere in eastern Ireland. The facts that there are acidic areas interspersed with the limestone, and also the presence of a rare and protected species, adds to its scientific interest.