

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: AYLE LOWER BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 000993

This site is located approximately 5 km north-east of Tulla, mainly in the townlands of Ayle Lower and Errinagh, in Co. Clare. The site comprises a lake and a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. This is one of the most western raised bogs in Ireland. The site is bordered by a stream at the south and south-west, by a road at the north and by agricultural fields at the east.

Ayle Lower Bog consists of two main lobes of high bog, separated by a small stream. The larger, western lobe is distinctly domed. There are wet areas on the high bog which consist of bog moss hummocks and lawns. Large areas of old peat-cutting exist around much of the site. However, the banks of the stream that runs through the site appear to form semi-natural margins. Hand-cutting of peat is carried out in a limited area at the north of the site, but otherwise peat-cutting has been abandoned and large areas at the north of the site are regenerating. At the east of the site there is an area of coniferous forestry on cutover and a small lake, Errinagh Lough.

The high bog at Ayle Lower possesses many of the species typical of Western Raised Bogs in Ireland, such as Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). At the east of the main lobe, in the wettest part of the bog, there are bog moss hummocks and lawns, with species such as *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. magellanicum* and *S. papillosum*. Other species present on the bog include Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.). The western side of the main lobe of high bog is much drier and is dominated by Bog Asphodel, Carnation Sedge and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*). There is a small depression in the centre of the bog with scattered Bog-myrtle. The cutover to the west of the site consists of wet fields between the high bog and the stream. At the northern boundary there are areas of scrub, with species such as Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Willow (*Salix* spp.) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). Regeneration of bog mosses is occurring in this area and Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and Purple Moor-grass are also found. Along the stream margins Downy Birch, Gorse and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) woodland is found.

Current landuse on the site consists of peat-cutting, both abandoned and active, mainly along the northern margin of the high bog, and the drainage associated with this. Large portions of the bog have been burned in the past and areas of cutover bog have been reclaimed for agricultural purposes. Dumping is carried out along the roadsides. 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.

Ayle Lower 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. Its importance is increased by the fact that it is one of the most western raised bogs in Ireland and appears to have semi-natural margins along the stream that runs through it. 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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