

Site Name: Keeper Hill SAC

Site Code: 001197

Keeper Hill, or Slievekimalta, is situated between the Silvermines and Slieve Felim Mountains, 13 km south of Nenagh in Co. Tipperary. Reaching an altitude of 695 m, this rounded, rather steep peak of Old Red Sandstone is notably higher than any of the surrounding upland areas. The site includes the summit and slopes above 250 m which have not yet been afforested.

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):

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| [4010] Wet Heath [7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)* |
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Mountain blanket bog at this site is dominated by cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). The moss layer is well developed with a deep bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) cover. The relatively uncommon *Sphagnum russowii* has been reported from this habitat. Other species recorded include Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*.

Heath occurs where the depth of peat is shallow. This is found at the summit, where peat has eroded, on the steep slopes and also in mosaic with blanket bog. The heath is predominantly wet heath, with Heather, Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Purple Moor-grass, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) being the most common species. Bog mosses are also well represented. On the higher areas, Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) and Crowberry, species indicative of alpine heath, occur. On the lower slopes the heath forms a mosaic with wet grassland and here patches of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub occur.

Upland grassland occurs on mineral soils on the lower slopes and is especially well-developed on the southern and northern slopes. The dominant species are Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*). In wetter areas, rush species such as *Juncus effusus* and *J. articulatus* become dominant.

Peregrine Falcon, a species listed in Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, breeds within the site. Red Grouse occur amongst the tall heather east of the summit.

Land use within the site consists of some peat cutting to the north-west of the summit and some track development. Grazing is minimal and confined to the lower grassy slopes to the north of the site. The site is almost entirely surrounded by coniferous forest plantations and this remains the greatest threat.

This site is of considerable conservation value due to the presence of two habitats which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, one of which has priority status. The presence of important bird species adds to the importance of the site.