

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SLIEVE AUGHTY BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 001229

Slieve Aughty Bog NHA consists primarily of upland blanket bog and heath habitat and is located immediately west of the village of Woodford and about 8 km west of Lough Derg, Co. Galway. The site comprises six discrete areas of blanket bog, both intact and cutover, at altitudes between 100 m and 230 m and lies in the townlands of Knockauncarragh, Commons East, Moyglass, Derreenamucka, Boleyveena, Drummin, Cullenagh, Derrybrien East and Derrybrien South. Forestry plantations adjoin all six areas and form the majority of the site boundaries, with the remaining areas bounded by rivers, roads and tracks. Bedrock geology is quartzite.

The dominant habitat is blanket bog, with the largest tract occurring in the eastern sector. Here the vegetation is generally dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), and includes species such as Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Hare's-tail Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Crossed-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). There are some well developed wet areas with excellent growths of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts), including a good diversity of bog mosses including *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. papillosum* and *S. subnitens*. Moss cover is consistently high at 80% in both hummock and carpet forms. On deep peat areas the vegetation is more characteristic of raised bog and includes Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*). Ling Heather bushes (30 cm high) occur here and the substrate is soft and wet underfoot. Extensive lawn areas, with some pools, support White-beaked Sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) Bog-myrtle. Grazing pressure is low with some slight poaching.

Areas of regenerating cutover are dominated by Deergrass, Purple Moor-grass, cottongrasses and Crossed-leaved Heath. Bog moss cover is lower here (30-40%) and there are cushions of lichen *Cladonia portentosa*. The adjacent bog surface has scattered Willow (*Salix* spp.) bushes.

Habitat diversity is increased further by the presence of flushes and small, in-filling lakes. These species poor flushes are dominated by Purple Moor-grass with occasional Bog-myrtle, Ling Heather, Crossed-leaved Heath and Bog Asphodel. Bog mosses *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. papillosum* are present (30%), together with the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, the liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea* and the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*. Other species found in the flushes include Carnation Sedge, Deergrass and Hare's-tail Cotton-grass.

The peat becomes shallow on higher slopes and bog vegetation grades into heath and acid grassland dominated by Ling Heather and a low sward of sedges (*Carex* spp.), Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*) and a variety of mosses.

The site supports Red Data Book species Red Grouse, Hen Harrier and small numbers of Whooper Swan that use Loughaunewa lake.

Landuse on the site includes peat-cutting and agriculture. Activities associated with agriculture include grazing by sheep and burning of vegetation. The site is threatened by afforestation which is the dominant landuse in the vicinity and more recently by wind energy installations. All these activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological condition of the site. However, the blanket bog is largely intact and relatively lightly grazed and is a good example of a habitat that was formerly more widespread in the Slieve Aughty Mountain range.

Slieve Aughty Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance supporting a significant area of upland blanket bog and associated habitats. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management.