

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CASTLE FFRENCH EAST BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 001244

Castle Ffrench East Bog is located 5km west of Ballyforan, mainly in the townlands of Castle Ffrench East and Gowla, Co. Galway. The site consists of a small, intact raised bog, situated in a region of intensive peat development. It can be accessed from local roads to the north and west. There are extensive areas of cutover peat to the south and east and along with Castle Ffrench West Bog to the south-west, this site represents the only intact raised bog habitat remaining in this region.

The site is a raised bog consisting of areas of both high bog and cutover. The high bog has active bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) growth and small pool systems to the north, west and east, some of which have dried out, indicating a lowering water-table. Two series of swallow-holes and two flushed areas are also present. There are also a number of overgrown drains to the north of the high bog. Flooded cutover, wet grassland and dry grassland occur around the margins of the high bog. There is also a small wet woodland and a small dry semi-natural woodland present on the site.

The high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, dominated by Common Cottongrasses (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) with Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.). The drier areas of the high bog to the west and south are dominated by Ling Heather and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) is quite abundant especially in wetter areas towards the centre of the high bog along with the moss (*Campylopus atrovirens*). There is good regeneration of bog mosses here with *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. capillifolium* (but no *S. imbricatum*) and the surface is quaking. The northern pool system is the remnant of a much larger system with most of the pools drying out and containing algae. The small pool system to the west has pools filled with the bog moss *S. cuspidatum* and between the pools Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) dominates with Deergrass and Cottongrasses. There is little bog moss, but some unburnt Ling Heather hummocks are present.

In the east a tear pool system with a north-south alignment occurs close to the high bog margin. It is wet and quaking with the bog mosses (*S. cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum*) and Sundew (*Drosera* spp.). A flush with Purple moor-grass (*Molina caerulea*) and Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) occurs to the north-east of the site with some small Birch (*Betula* spp.) also present. The flushed area to the south-west has a carpet of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) with Purple moor-grass, Bog Myrtle and abundant Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*). This flush appears to be drying out due to drainage. A small natural drainage channel with swallow-holes occurs to the north of the site. Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog moss (*Sphagnum auriculatum*), Carnation Sedge and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) are present. Stunted Birch line this channel and Ling Heather with Lichen dominate the surrounding vegetation. A larger swallow-hole system occurs to the south-east of the

high bog with tall Birch, Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Bilberry.

A dry semi-natural woodland with Oak (*Quercus* spp.), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Holly occurs on a small mineral ridge to the south of the site and a small flooded Birch wood is present on cutover to the north-west. Dry grassland also occurs along the southern ridge and flooded cutover and wet grassland occur around the margins of the site. Some of the old cutover is wet with Purple moor-grass, Bog Myrtle and regenerating bog mosses.

Current landuse on the site consists of agriculture and mechanical peat-cutting to the north and north-west. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage and burning. There is very little new drainage on the high bog, but large portions of the bog are being burnt at regular intervals with dead hummocks and burnt Ling Heather evident. 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. However the site is quite wet and some bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) regeneration is occurring and this will probably improve if burning stops. Some dumping also occurs by the roadside.

Castle Ffrench East Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising as it does a relatively intact raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. This site supports a range of raised bog habitats including pool systems, flushes, swallow holes and is showing signs of active regeneration. The presence of woodland and dry grassland adds to the diversity of the site. 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.