

**Site Name: Gortnandarragh Limestone Pavement SAC**

**Site Code: 001271**

Gortnandarragh Limestone Pavement is located on the southern side of Lough Corrib, about 7 km south-east of Oughterard in Co. Galway. The site consists of an exposed limestone plateau which slopes down on its eastern side to cut-over fen and bog. Parts of the pavement exhibit a well-developed system of clints and grykes, while other parts are shattered, with much loose rock. The pavement forms a mosaic with heath, grassland and scrub. Much of the central part is open but the eastern side contains enclosures and is grazed by cattle.

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*
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The limestone pavement at the site supports a typical flora, including Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria albicans*), Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*) and ferns (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*, *A. trichomanes* and *Ceterach officinarum*). Scattered Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) occur but most are browsed, and the Yew in particular exhibits the effects of severe browsing pressure.

The heath at the site is species-rich and is dominated by a mixture of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). Other species present include Blue Moor-grass, Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), fescue (*Festuca* sp.), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Juniper, Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, Cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), St. John's-wort (*Hypericum* sp.), eyebrights (*Euphrasia* spp.), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*). There are numerous ant hills which are characterised by the presence of Wild Thyme and Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*). The heath appears to be under-grazed and scrub is invading. However, there are signs of goats present (droppings and skull noted).

The grassland is dominated by Blue Moor-grass, with many of the same species present as in the heath, but with additional species such as Mountain Everlasting

(*Antennaria dioica*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), violet (*Viola* sp). On the eastern side the land is grazed by cattle and here there are additional species such as Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*). Juniper is particularly abundant here, especially on the area sloping to the bog and this is likely to correspond to the E.U. Habitats Directive category 'Juniper formations'. Small wet patches also occur here with fen species, e.g. Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), and Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*). Where the habitats grade into peatland, Purple Moor-grass, Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) occur, and this community grades into cut-away blanket-bog type vegetation.

There is a large area of oak-Ash-Hazel woodland and scrub on rocky limestone on the south side of the site. Small stature Hazel dominates the woodland canopy, overtopped frequently by Ash. Mature Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) is abundant. The field layer is particularly species-rich, composed chiefly of Wild Strawberry, Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) and False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*). The rocks are covered mainly by the mosses *Hylocomium brevirostre* and *Thuidium tamariscinum*. *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* is abundant on the soil whilst *Neckera crispa* clothes many of the tree boles.

An area of cut-away bog to the east contrasts with the limestone habitats dominating the rest of the site. This is the only known locality for the endemic fungus *Entoloma jennyi*.

The main land use on the site is extensive grazing by cattle and goats. Threats to the site include over-grazing, land reclamation and quarrying, the latter two already occurring to a small extent within the site.

Gortnandarragh is valuable as an example of limestone pavement, an internationally important habitat which is listed with priority status, on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is also notable because the bog on the site is the type locality and only known station for *Entoloma jennyi*. Furthermore, there are interesting and diverse areas of heath, grassland, scrub and woodland, all contributing to a valuable site of considerable conservation interest.