

Site Name: Arroo Mountain SAC

Site Code: 001403

Arroo Mountain is a large mountain complex which is comprised of blanket bog, heathland, upland grassland, calcareous flushes, wooded ravines, limestone gorges and steep limestone cliffs which have developed on top of an undulating limestone plateau. It is the most north-easterly part of the Ben Bulbin range of mountains, and is located 3 km south-west of Kinlough in Co. Leitrim.

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):

[4010] Wet Heath
[4030] Dry Heath
[4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
[7220] Petrifying Springs*
[8120] Calcareous Scree
[8210] Calcareous Rocky Slopes

The steep cliffs on the north face of Arroo were one of the first areas on the mountain to be identified as of botanical interest. They are nearly vertical with a steep talus slope. Active erosion has created several interesting geomorphological features at their base, including sharp pinnacles and large rock slides.

The cliffs have a distinctive flora, similar to the Ben Bulbin range, which contains several high-level arctic-alpine species that are common here but occur very rarely in the rest of the country. Species of interest include Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*), which is occasional in the north and west but very rare elsewhere; Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), frequent in the south and west but local elsewhere; Mountain Avens (*Dryas octopetala*), locally abundant in the north and west but very rare in mountains of the north; and Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*) which is restricted to mountain cliffs in the west and the Galtee Mountains. Several species which are listed in the Irish Red Data Book occur at this site. Purple Saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*), a rare species found only in mountains in the west and north, Hoary Whitlowgrass (*Draba incana*) which occurs mainly in the north-west of the country, and Yellow Saxifrage (*S. aizoides*) which is virtually confined to mountains of the north-west are all found.

The cliffs also contain a very rich assemblage of calcareous bryophytes, including several Red Listed species such as *Schistidium trichodon*, *Seligeria oelandica* and *Timmia norvegica*. The scree below cliffs also contains an exceptional diversity of ferns.

The main plateau area of the mountain supports blanket bog and heath communities and is of ecological interest. The hydrology of the plateau is interesting and a number of unusual geomorphological features that reflect the underlying limestone occur. Many streams and flushes drain into sinkholes and several large flushes found at the base of limestone cliffs have an enriched calcicole element in the flora. Springs, some of which have tufa formations, are also a feature of the site. Species recorded from petrifying springs here include stoneworts (*Chara* spp.), Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), water-starworts (*Callitriche* spp.), Common Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*) and various sedges (*Carex* spp.). Bryophytes are usually abundant, with species such as *Drepanocladus revolvens*, *Aulacomium palustre* and *Scorpidium scorpioides* occurring, as well as rare species such as *Didymodon maximus* and *Cinclidium stygium*.

The heath flora is well developed, with mature stands of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) in some areas. The summit of Arroo Mountain supports a large area of wet heath, and cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is good. Active blanket bog occurs in the south (Cloghmeen Bog), in the north-east of the site (Carrowrevagh Bog) and as small pockets scattered over the plateau. These areas support typical highland/mountain blanket bog plant species, but generally lack features such as pools. Because of their overall extent and integrity, the peatlands on Arroo Mountain are highly rated.

Peregrine and Golden Plover, both species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, breed within the site.

Sheep grazing poses the greatest threat to the site, and over-grazing has degraded the blanket bog on the west and east sides. Turbary is also encroaching on the north and south-east sides. However, unlike most other uplands in this region, afforestation has not taken place.

The quality and range of habitats, and the variety of rare species, within this site makes it of high scientific and conservation importance. Together, Ben Bulbin and Arroo Mountain comprise one of the floristically richest areas in the country, supporting excellent examples of arctic-alpine vegetation communities. The interesting geomorphological and hydrological facets add greatly to the ecological and scientific value of the site.