

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: FORTHILL BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 001448

Forthill Bog NHA is located 2 km from the north-eastern shore of Lough Ree and 2 km south-east of Newtown Cashel. It is mainly situated in the townlands of Forthill, Claras, Ballyrevagh and Newtownflanagan, Co. Longford. It is one of only two raised bogs in this region that have not been developed for commercial peat extraction. This bog is 4 km south-west of the Ballymahon to Lanesborough road (R392) and can be accessed from local roads to the south-east and bog tracks to the west and north-west of the site. It is bounded by mineral soil to the east, improved grassland and cutover to the west and Birch scrub on cutover to the north.

The site consists of a small raised bog with a single dome of high bog and associated cutover. The main features of interest are the pools, flushes and wetter areas of the high bog. Towards the north-east of the high bog, there is a good though somewhat limited pool system and a small flush is present to the south-east.

The high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cottongrass (*Eriophorum* spp.), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and Deergass (*Scirpus caespitosus*) with Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*). Overall the high bog surface is quite wet and although bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) are not very abundant, there is regeneration over most of the high bog. The dried out marginal areas to the south and south-west have little moss cover and are dominated by Ling Heather, Bog Asphodel and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) with some Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). There is some cracking and subsidence here with associated tear pools. Towards the north-eastern section of the high bog, there is a small pool system with some pools containing bog moss (*Sphagnum cuspidatum*) and Sundew (*Drosera* spp.). Between the pools, bog mosses (*Sphagnum imbricatum*, *S. magellanicum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. papillosum*) are more dominant and the rare bog moss *S. fuscum* is also present. A small flush occurs in the south-east around an in-filling lake, which has wet habitat of bog moss (*Sphagnum cuspidatum*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Cranberry and Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*). The bog surface is slightly quaking around this lake.

There is extensive cutover present on this site, especially to the south and west. This is dominated by Purple Moor-grass, Ling Heather and Soft Rush. The cutover to the north-west is dominated by Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) scrub. Along the eastern margin, there is a flushed area on a transition between the high bog and mineral soil. Purple Moor-grass dominates with Creeping Bent-grass (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and large clumps of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*). This area has dried out due to drainage and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is sparse. This may be the remnant of a lagg zone between the bog and the surrounding mineral soil. The ditches on the eastern and north-western boundaries are on mineral soil and contain Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.) and other

aquatic plants, which reveal the groundwater influence in these locations. There is also Birch (*Betula* spp.) scrub on cutover to the north, with Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) dominating the ground layer.

Current landuse on the site consists of agricultural reclamation of old cutover and mechanical peat-cutting. Damaging activities associated with these include poaching, drainage and burning with large portions of the bog being burnt at regular intervals. 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. Dumping of household rubbish and agricultural waste has also been noted on this site.

Forthill Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising as it does a 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 micro-habitats including pools and flushes and the rare bog moss *Sphagnum fuscum*. This bog, although small and damaged by extensive cutaway, developed on the shores of Lough Ree and is the largest remaining intact bog in the region. 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.