

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: ESHBRACK BOG NHA**

**SITE CODE: 001603**

Eshbrack Bog NHA is an extensive area of upland blanket bog located about 8 km north-west of Scotstown, Co. Monaghan in the townlands of Eshnaglogh and Knockanearla. The site links directly with Slieve Beagh, a Special Area of Conservation in Northern Ireland and has an altitude range of between 200 m and 350 m. The bedrock geology consists of Carboniferous Sandstone.

A stream that flows north-east along the Tyrone/Monaghan border forms the northern boundary of the site. The Colebrooke River forms part of the western boundary of the site.

On the high ground blanket bog is extensively developed. This is largely dominated by a combination of Deer Sedge (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Hare's-tail Cotton grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and a range of mosses such as *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*, *S. tenellum* and *Hypnum cupressiforme*. In places Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) is an abundant component of the vegetation. A number of bog pools are found on the site and several lakes occur which vary in species composition depending on nutrient status and water depth. Two of these, Lough Naheery and Lough Sallagh, straddle the Monaghan/Tyrone border. The former is a good example of an oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) lake and contains characteristic species such as Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*). The latter is an example of a species-poor dystrophic lake.

Relatively undisturbed heath communities occur on the bog margins and on the slopes of some of the shallow stream valleys. In some places the peat has been cut down to the more mineral, though still acid, sub-soils and vegetation more typical of acid grasslands has developed here, typified by Velvet Bent (*Agrostis canina*) and Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*). Lowland wet grassland occurs in the bottoms of the shallow valleys. Scrub stands are generally small and isolated, occurring mainly on the steeper sections of the river valleys. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is the main species, often occurring with Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*).

Flushes occur on some of the valley sides and valley bottoms and these can vary in species composition depending on water movement and water chemistry. Slightly flushed slopes tend to be dominated by Purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) but as flushing increases the vegetation is characterised by Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) and an increase in mosses and broad-leaved herbs.

Several bird species listed in the Irish Red Data Book are found within the site including Greenland White-fronted Goose, Hen Harrier, Merlin and Golden Plover.

Grazing and heather burning have maintained an open structure to the heath and grassland communities but has resulted in modification to some areas of the blanket bog. Nevertheless, heather is still relatively abundant in places and provides excellent habitat for Red Grouse, a declining and threatened species in Ireland. Conifer plantations, mainly planted on lands under 300 m altitude, have been a major cause of habitat loss in the vicinity of the site. Second rotation crops are being planted where commercially mature conifer plantations have been harvested. These pose a continuing threat to the intact bog through the negative impacts of drainage, fertilisation and self-seeding of conifers onto the bog surface. Drainage associated with peat cutting has also affected the hydrological integrity of the site.

Eshbrack Bog NHA contains the last remaining relatively intact bog habitat in Co. Monaghan. Although parts of the site have been affected by hand cutting and mechanical peat extraction, much of the cutover areas are now starting to regenerate. The intact blanket bog areas feature hummock/hollow complexes and flushed slopes and the wide range of associated habitats, which include upland grassland on peaty soil, heath, reedbed, swamp, freshwater marsh, scrub and wet, broadleaved woodland, add considerably to the conservation value of the site. The occurrence of Cranberry, an uncommon species of blanket bog and of very restricted distribution in the county, is also of note. A number of bird species listed in the Irish Red Data Book occur in the site, including Greenland White-fronted Goose, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Golden Plover and Red Grouse.

Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. Northwest 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.

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