

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: SLIEVEWARD BOG NHA**

**SITE CODE: 001902**

Slieve Ward Bog NHA contains a range of habitats including upland blanket bog, heaths, deciduous woodland and calcareous fen. It is located 1.5 km south-west of Ballysadare, Co. Sligo and is situated within the townlands of Corhawnagh, Cooney, Largan and Lugnamackan. It is one of the most easterly outliers of the Ox Mountain range. Its geological location partially accounts for the interesting nature of the area, as it is sited where the acid metamorphic rocks of the Ox Mountains meet calcareous limestones of the lowlands. A road marks the western boundary to the site while the base of the hills form the remaining boundaries. The altitude range is between 30 m and 199 m.

The site contains a considerable range of habitats ranging from calcareous fens, springs and scrub woodland to more acid blanket bog, wet heath, dry heath and small streams or flushed areas. Drainage northwards from the summits and slopes of Slieve Ward and Crocknahoo meet calcareous springs at the base resulting in an interesting mix of fens and flushes. These are rich in Sedge (*Carex*) species, especially Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Glaucous Sedge (*C. flacca*), Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*) and Common Sedge (*C. nigra*). Two uncommon sedges also occur, Slender-tufted Sedge (*Carex acuta*) and Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*C. lepidocarpa*). Other frequently occurring species include Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). An uncommon plant, Variegated Horsetail (*Equisetum variegatum*) is exceptionally abundant in one of the fens. Small reedbeds occur in places, with Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).

Deciduous woodland which consists mainly of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) with occasional open stands of Oak, covers the slopes above the fens. Under the trees, Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) are common.

On the upper slopes and plateau areas an interesting mosaic of upland blanket bog, wet heath, dry heath and flushed areas occurs. On flat plateau areas blanket bog has accumulated with characteristic species occurring such as Deergrass (*Scirpus caespitosus*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Carnation Sedge and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). While open bog pools are not common, frequent in-filling, wet hollows containing Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and bog mosses such as *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, *S. auriculatum* and *S. papillosum* occur. Around the

edges of these pools, hummocks of the bog moss *Sphagnum capillifolium* are frequent.

Where peat is more shallow wet heath is common with species such as Ling Heather, Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Cross-leaved Heath. Also present are Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Tormentil, Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Green-ribbed sedge (*Carex binervis*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) and the moss *Breutelia chrysocoma*. A good cover of bog mosses also occurs with hummocks of *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. papillosum* and *S. subnitens*.

Wet flushed areas and small streams are common across the slopes. Species characteristic of these areas include Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Meadowsweet and Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*). Other rushes such as Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Compact Rush (*J. conglomeratus*) and Jointed Rush (*J. articulatus*) are common. Frequently occurring sedges include Common Sedge, Bladder-sedge (*Carex vesicaria*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Yellow-sedge (*Carex flava*), Bottle Sedge, Carnation Sedge and Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). At least two types of orchids occur, Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) and Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*). Also occasionally present are Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and small stands of Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*).

On drier slopes, dry heath vegetation occurs with characteristic species such as Bell Heather, short Ling Heather, Bilberry, Great Wood-rush, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and a species of Violet (*Viola* sp.). Other species occurring on drier outcrops are Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and a species of Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla* sp.). Grass species include Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Quaking Grass (*Briza media*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) and Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*).

Land use over the whole site is light, with minimal grazing by feral goats being the only potentially disturbing activity observed. In the past, drainage schemes were proposed for the flat ground at the northern and eastern ends of the site but these did not proceed.

Slieveard Bog NHA is of considerable conservation significance as it contains a diverse and species-rich range of habitats including blanket bog, wet and dry heath, deciduous woodland and calcareous fen as well as an exceptional range and rarity of the species. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west 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.