

Site Name: Bellacorick Bog Complex SAC

Site Code: 001922

Bellacorick Bog Complex is a large peatland site in Co. Mayo, situated on a low-lying undulating plain and consisting of two large areas separated by an area of forestry. The larger of the two areas extends from south of Bellacorick eastwards, south-eastwards and then north to Doobehy. The smaller area is situated 6 km south-east of Glenamoy and extends south to 3 km north of Bellacorick and east towards Doobehy.

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):

[3160] Dystrophic Lakes
[4010] Wet Heath
[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation
[7230] Alkaline Fens
[1013] Geyer's Whorl Snail (<i>Vertigo geyeri</i>)
[1528] Marsh Saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>)

This site contains some of the most extensive areas of lowland blanket bog remaining in Ireland, with outstanding pool development. As well as typical lowland blanket bog vegetation, areas with intermediate bog characteristics are particularly well represented. These areas are typified by domes with raised bog species such as the bog mosses *Sphagnum imbricatum*, *S. magellanicum* and *S. fuscum*, and without Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Excellent examples of transitions to minerotrophic flushes and fens are also a feature of the site.

The site includes some excellent examples of dystrophic lakes. Included here are the numerous sizeable lakes and large inter-connecting pool systems which characterise the blanket bog plateaux. This habitat type is particularly well represented at this site, with some the finest remaining examples in the country. They are typically species-poor, and many are completely devoid of macrophyte vegetation. Those with vegetation contain species such as Bog-sedge (*Carex limosa*), Bogbean, Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) and bladderworts (*Utricularia* spp.). Pool size and pattern is diverse, ranging from concentric strings of pools to large, irregularly shaped lakes with eroding peaty margins. Many contain vegetated and ungrazed islands.

Rhynchosporion vegetation is a feature of many of the pool areas at the site and also of areas of wet, quaking peat where White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) is typically dominant. In such areas there is often a luxuriant growth of the bog mosses *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and/or *S. auriculatum*. Other characteristic species of the pools and moss lawns include Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and sundews (*Drosera anglica* and *D. intermedia*).

Spring-fed species-rich flushes are a significant feature of this site and occur throughout the bog complex. Many of these flushes are very large. Some of these are iron-flushed, notably those at Brackloon Lough on the eastern margin of the site. The vegetation supported by these flushes include poor fen, rich fen and swamp carr communities. The site contains the largest assemblage of intact fen vegetation in Ireland. Some of the flushes are dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.), with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) or Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) with a thick *Sphagnum* layer underneath. Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Purple Moor-grass have been recorded from the iron-rich flushes. Occasional clumps of willow (*Salix* spp.) also occur.

The flushes are also notable for the presence of several boreal relict mosses and liverworts, particularly *Homalothecium nitens*, *Leicolea rutheana* and *Paludella squarrosa*. The moss *Sphagnum warnstorffii* has been reported from a fen south-west of Brackloon Lough. A rare vascular plant species, Marsh Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*), occurs here at one of only very few known locations in Ireland. This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, as well as on the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

Many of the bogland areas are traversed by river and stream channels with diverse associated vegetation. An extensive collapsed swallow-hole system is found at Shralahy with mature Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) occurring.

The site also contains rushy fields, cut-away bog and small areas of scrub and wet woodland. Good examples of wet heath vegetation occur occasionally on sloping ground and on elevated mounds of mineral soil that are scattered throughout the lowland blanket bog-covered plains. These are particularly evident in the Owenboy Nature Reserve and along some of the steeper stream valley sides. These areas are typically dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), with Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum capillifolium* also present.

The site supports a population of the rare snail, *Vertigo geyeri*, a species that is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The main threats to the integrity of the site are turf-cutting and afforestation. Overgrazing has impacted negatively on the quality of the site in some places.

The site includes several well-documented sites of considerable conservation significance, e.g. Formoyle, Brackloon and Cloonoragh flushes and the Owenboy and Knockmoyle-Sheskin Nature Reserves. These areas are still intact and remain of

unique scientific and conservation interest. The site complex also includes important peatland sites: Tawnaghs Bog, Eskeragh Bog, Sranacally Bog, Derry Upper Bog, Derry Lower Bog, Bellacorick Bog and Dooleeg Beg Bog. Some recent afforestation has occurred on Eskeragh and Sranacally Bogs. In general, these bogs have a good range of blanket bog habitats and occasional rare plant species.

The site is one of the largest tracts of lowland blanket bog in the country, with the finest examples of intact pool systems. It is considered to be of international importance due to the extent of the individual areas of bog and the wide variety of habitats present and because of the presence of a number of rare and threatened plant and animal species.