



Site Name: Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC

Site Code: 001955

Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC is located on the north-western side of Achill Island, in north-west Co. Mayo. The underlying geology is pre-Cambrian schists and gneisses at Slievemore and quartzite at Croaghaun. The site consists largely of two mountains, Croaghaun and Slievemore, both over 650 m O.D. It is dominated by cliffs which can exceed 300 m, with scree mantling the slopes above the vertical cliffs. From the high cliffs around Croaghaun towards the northern cliff edge is a group of five cirques perched at various levels above the sea. In these corries some very old and degraded moraines are found.

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)*
[8110] Siliceous Scree
[8220] Siliceous Rocky Slopes

Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC contains interesting mix of blanket bog and heath communities. Alpine heath is found at high altitudes in a mosaic with scree and exposed rock, patches of blanket bog and corrie lakes. The montane heath is of particular importance for its communities of oceanic bryophytes, some of which constitute what is known as the north Atlantic hepatic mat community, which descends on Achill to its lowest known altitude. As well as the typical species for this community, a number of rarities are found including *Adelanthus lindenbergianus*, *Bazzania pearsonii*, *Mastigophora woodsii*, *Dicranodontium uncinatum*, *Scapania ornithopodioides* and the filmy ferns *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* and *H. tunbrigense*. In flushed areas, the rare bog moss *Sphagnum warnstorffii* occurs. An interesting array vascular plants are also found on the summits, including St. Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*), Starry Saxifrage (*S. stellaris*), Dwarf Willow (*Salix herbacea*), Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Lesser Twayblade (*Listera cordata*) and Stiff Sedge (*Carex bigelowii*). An uncommon species of eyebright, *Euphrasia frigida*, is found on Croaghaun, while the scarp below Slievemore supports another scarce species, Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*).

On the rocky habitats, scree slopes, gullies and cliffs around the corrie lakes of Loughs Bunnafreva and Nakeeroge, other notable bryophytes are found including *Plagiothecium cavifolium*, *Cyclodictyon laetevirens*, *Andeaea rothii*, *Geocalyx graveolens*, *Anthelia juratzkana*, *Radula carringtonii*, *Marsupella sprucei* and *M. sphacelata*.

The vegetation of the sea cliffs at Achill Head consists of well-developed examples of plantain sward (*Plantago* association) which extends up to 150 m up the cliffs. In some areas there is a dense smooth mat of Sea Plantain (*P. maritima*) and Buck's-horn Plantain (*P. coronopus*), dotted with Thrift (*Armeria,maritima*), Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Sea Pearlwort (*Sagina maritima*), Procumbent Pearlwort (*S. procumbens*), Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium tetrandum*), Allseed (*Radiola linoides*) and the grasses *Festuca ovina*, *Aira praecox* and *Agrostis capillaris*. The low sea cliffs in the north are hung with Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*).

There are five corrie lakes within the site. At Bunnafreva Lough East, Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*) has been recorded, with an abundance of Water Dropwort (*Lobelia dortmanna*). Other habitats at the site include both wet and dry heaths, upland rivers, sea cliffs, islets and small areas of boulder and sandy beaches and some machair.

The uncommon species Irish Heath (*Erica erigena*) has its most westerly station on the shores of Lough Nakeeroge. The plant was recorded here between 1982 and 1984. About 40 bushes were seen in a small bay on the northern lakeshore and ten plants were seen growing along a stream that flows into the lake from the west. This plant has a disjunct distribution being found in Spain, Portugal and western France, and counties Galway and Mayo in Ireland.

Chough, a localised species of the western seaboard, breeds at this site with up to four pairs recorded during a survey in 1992. Chough is an E.U. Birds Directive Annex I species.

The main land use at the site is grazing, with stock occurring at high densities in places, especially on the lower slopes where the vegetation is eroded down to mineral soil in places. Peat cutting is carried out in some areas. Other land uses include amenity management, involving track development and provision of car parks, and quarrying immediately adjacent to the boundary at the south centre of the site.

This site is of ecological interest for its excellent quality heaths and rocky habitats, supporting a range of rare species of vascular plants and bryophytes. The presence of a number of other typical coastal and upland habitats adds habitat diversity to this scenic site.