

Site Name: Boleybrack Mountain SAC

Site Code: 002032

Boleybrack Mountain SAC comprises an extensive upland plateau situated to the north of Lough Allen in Co. Leitrim. It is dominated by active mountain blanket bog and wet heath, with small oligotrophic/dystrophic lakes scattered throughout. The site also contains low rocky cliffs, areas of dry heath and a variety of grassland types, including heathy grassland dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), upland acid grassland, orchid-rich meadows and wet, rushy pastures.

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
[4030] Dry Heath
[6410] <i>Molinia</i> Meadows
[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*

Within this SAC the mountain blanket bog is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and moss species such as *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. palustre* and *Racomitrium lanuginosum*. Intact areas of bog have a varied topography with hummocks of *R. lanuginosum*, the lichen *Cladonia portentosa* and Heather, interspersed with lawns of both Common Cottongrass and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*E. vaginatum*). The level areas of bog also feature pools that contain species such as the bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Other prominent species present include Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). Locally rare species recorded in this habitat include Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Dioecious Sedge (*Carex dioica*) and the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*.

Areas of wet heath feature expanses of Heather interspersed with Purple Moor-grass, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutifloris*) and tussocks of Hare's-tail Cottongrass. Other species present include Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). The locally rare species Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) and Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) occur in this habitat.

Dry heath is widely distributed throughout this site, and is best-developed in areas with shallow, well-drained peat on areas of sloping ground or close to rocky outcrops. The floristic composition of this habitat is similar to that of wet heath, except that species indicative of wetter conditions are largely absent – e.g. Cross-leaved Heath, Purple Moor-grass and the bog moss *Sphagnum papillosum*. The dominant species is usually Heather, with the following species also common: Bell Heather, Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Tormentil, Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). The main bryophyte species found are *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *Hypnum jutlandicum*.

This site is dominated by an upland plateau which contains approximately 20 lakes. The largest of these is Lough Kip, which is about 10 ha in size. Many of the lakes contain little vegetation, and conform to the dystrophic lake category. Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*) has been recorded in shallow water at the edge of some of the lakes, while rafts of the bog mosses *Sphagnum recurvum* and *S. palustre* are a feature of some others. In one case, a small lake has infilled almost entirely with a *Sphagnum* raft. The species recorded associated with the raft include *S. auriculatum*, *S. papillosum*, *S. recurvum*, Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Common Cottongrass and Bogbean.

The acid grassland areas support a variety of grass species, the most common being bents (*Agrostis* spp.) and fescues (*Festuca* spp.). This species-rich habitat also supports a variety of herb species such as Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), clovers (*Trifolium* spp.) and Cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), amongst others. Wetter heathy grasslands dominated by Purple Moor-grass occur on the lower slopes of the site, and some areas are quite orchid-rich, with abundant Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*D. fuchsii*), particularly in south-eastern sections of the site. Other common species in these types of grasslands include Sharp-flowered Rush, Soft Rush, Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Oval Sedge (*Carex ovalis*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Heath Wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora*). Areas of rush pasture on the site are dominated by Soft Rush and Sharp-flowered Rush, interspersed with Marsh bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*).

The site provides excellent areas of feeding habitat for Red Grouse, Snipe, Curlew and Ravens. Golden Plover nests within the site (2-3 pairs), while Hen Harrier may use the site for foraging. Both these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

The site is lightly grazed by sheep and locally affected by burning and turbary. Much of the site is bounded by mature coniferous forestry plantations; recent planting on areas of blanket bog has caused significant local damage.

The site is of considerable conservation importance for the various habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive that it supports, in particular the good examples of mountain blanket bog and wet heath. The examples of these habitats on the site are among the best remaining in the northern half of the country. The

presence of a number of rare plant species and of a variety of bird species adds to the conservation significance of the site.