

Site Name: Ballyhoura Mountains SAC

Site Code: 002036

The Ballyhoura Mountains straddle the border between counties Limerick and Cork, and are situated about 10 km south of Kilmallock. The portion of the site within Co. Cork side is largely afforested with commercial conifer plantations, while there are still extensive areas in Co. Limerick that remain as open heathland and blanket bog. The site includes the summits of Seefin (528 m) and Carron Mountains (approx. 440 m), and descends to lower altitudes (270 m) at Glenosheen. Of geological interest are the Conglomerate tors, notably on Coolfree Mountain to the south-east, Long Mountain to south and Black Rock to the north centre.

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
[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*

At this site wet heath occurs in mosaic with blanket bog and dry heath. Extensive areas of wet heath occur on the summit and surrounding slopes of Seefin Mountain and below Coolfree Mountain to the east. Wet heath vegetation is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), with frequent Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and a range of mosses and liverworts. Dry heath is also frequent within this site and can be found at most elevations where the peat depth is shallow. Species that are characteristic of this habitat include Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), bent grasses (*Agrostis* spp.) and mosses such as *Hypnum jutlandicum*. The site also contains significant areas of blanket bog, most of which is confined to ground which is relatively flat. This vegetation is generally dominated by Heather, with species such as Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*), Bilberry and occasional Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). The heath and blanket bog are largely undisturbed and have not been burnt in recent years. The east side of the site also contains extensive rock outcrops that add to the value and diversity of the heath/blanket bog vegetation.

The Ballyhoura Mountain range, including the largely afforested slopes outside the cSAC, are important for birds. Seven pairs of Hen Harrier and one pair of Peregrine are known to use the site. Both of these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The unplanted bog and heath within the site provides crucial foraging habitat and potential nesting sites for this very important Hen Harrier population.

In summary, the Ballyhoura Mountains are important for conservation, particularly in relation to the extensive areas of relatively undisturbed heath and bog vegetation. Stream headwaters and rock outcrops add to the diversity of the site. The heathland and surrounding afforested slopes are important for Hen Harrier and Peregrine.