



Site Name: Lough Golagh and Breesy Hill SAC

Site Code: 002164

This site is situated midway between Ballyshannon and Pettigo in south Co. Donegal. Its eastern boundary follows the border between Donegal and Fermanagh. It includes Breesy Hill (264 m), Crumnalannav Hill and several medium-sized lakes (Loughs Golagh, Lee, Unshin, Finn and Cam). Much of the site is underlain by acid gneiss, which commonly outcrops on higher ground. These rocks meet limestone in the northern section of the site, at Lough Golagh and Lough Lee, which are underlain by both rock types.

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):

[7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*

Blanket bog is the main habitat found at this site. This is mostly dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and the lichen, *Cladonia portentosa*, occurring commonly. Pool and hummock systems are found in several areas. Particularly well-developed systems are found in the southern section of the site and on the south-western side of Lough Lee. Of note is the presence in these areas of hummocks of the scarce bog moss *Sphagnum imbricatum*.

South-west of Breesy Hill is an area of old, re-generating cut-away bog with wet trenches, filled by bog mosses and dry banks colonised by Purple Moor-grass and Heather.

Several streams and lakes occur within the site. Black Bog-rush, Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), frequently occur in flushed areas by streams. The aquatic vegetation of the lakes includes species such as Water Lobelia (*Lobelia dortmanna*), Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and the occasional stonewort (e.g. *Nitella flexilis*). Emergent communities include species such as Common Reed, Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Great Fen-sedge and Common Club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*).

The geological variation in the substrate of Lough Golagh and Lough Lee adds to the habitat diversity of the site. On the eastern shores of these lakes (underlain by acid gneiss) blanket bog, scrub and heath occur, while on the western margins (underlain by limestone) several areas of base-enriched fen and sedge-rich communities are

found. Plant species found in these fen areas include Tufted-sedge (*Carex elata*), Black Bog-rush, Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*). Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria albicans*), Juniper (*Juniperis communis*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*), among other species, occur on outcropping limestone by the shores of these lakes.

The site includes a small area of dry, broadleaved, semi-natural woodland dominated by tall, mature Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Active Badger setts occur within the woodland.

An island in Lough Golagh supports a colony of Common Tern (40 pairs in 1984, 9 nesting sites in 1992) and Black-headed Gull (350 pairs in 1977, 256 nesting sites in 1992). The former species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Other birdlife found on the site includes Grey Heron, Kestrel, Raven, Red Grouse, Snipe, Stonechat and Woodpigeon.

Grazing by sheep and cattle occurs throughout the site, and in some areas this has resulted in damage to the vegetation cover and peat surface. Peat extraction by machine has damaged some areas of blanket bog.

Most of the site comprises a largely intact example of upland blanket bog, a priority habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site is contiguous with an area of blanket bog on the Fermanagh side of the border. The juxtaposition of acidic and alkaline rock types adds to the botanical and ecological diversity of some of the lakes on the site. Of additional conservation significance is the presence of the Gull/Tern colony at Lough Golagh.