



**Site Name: Wooddown Bog SAC**

**Site Code: 002205**

Wooddown Bog SAC occurs within the larger raised bog system that is designated as Wooddown Bog NHA (000694). It is situated 5.0 km north-east of Mullingar in the townland of Wooddown, Co. Westmeath. The underlying geology is carboniferous limestone.

The site is part of a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The site is bordered by open high bog on its northern and western margins, by forestry on cutover bog on its eastern margin and by agricultural grassland on its southern side.

Wooddown Bog SAC has a small area of open high bog but most of the area was covered by coniferous forestry, which has been recently clear-felled. The bog is intensively drained and most of this drainage is associated with forestry. A deep drain bisects the dome surface, running from north-east to south-west, from the planted area to the middle of the adjacent unplanted dome. There is a small soak located on the cutover at the north-west margin of the high bog. This area supports a low canopy Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Willow (*Salix* spp.) woodland. The cutover to the south supports Downy Birch and Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub. Young trees of Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*) are encroaching onto the adjacent high bog to the north and west of the site through natural regeneration.

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):

[7120] Degraded Raised Bog
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Degraded Raised Bog (DRB) corresponds to those areas of high bog where the hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration to Active Raised Bog (ARB) within 30 years.

Wooddown Bog is a Midlands Raised Bog type, which has developed in a topographic basin. Typical raised bog species are present on the unplanted dome. However, an absence of pools and a reduction in the cover of *Sphagnum* indicates that the bog has dried out. The open high bog vegetation is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hare's tail Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), with White-beaked sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*)

and the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*, with the bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum*, *Sphagnum subnitens* and *Sphagnum capillifolium*.

There is a flush and soak system on the north-west margin of the high bog, which supports Downy Birch and Willow woodland with an understorey of Heather, Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

With the clear-felling of conifers and blocking of drains, water-levels have risen and now remain high throughout the year. In some areas conditions in the wet flats and hollows are now suitable to support even the most drainage sensitive species. As a consequence, raised bog vegetation has returned to the high bog. At this early stage of restoration, the raised bog vegetation is dominated by Heather and Hare's tail Cotton-grass. Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bog Asphodel and White-beaked sedge are locally common and small amounts of Bilberry and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) are widespread. Bog mosses are regenerating and include *Sphagnum papillosum*, *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *Sphagnum palustre*, with *Sphagnum recurvum* in drains with a combined cover of approximately 50%. At the current rate of progress these wet areas should have been restored to active bog in 20 years. However the majority of the restored areas have not yet developed vegetation characteristic of the wettest conditions and there is a considerable amount of conifer and birch regeneration occurring in these areas which will require ongoing management.

Current landuse on the site consists of conservation management with the removal of conifer plantations and the blocking of drainage associated with these plantations, both on the high bog and on the cutover. This work was undertaken as part of the Coillte E.U. Life Project *Demonstrating Best Practice in Raised Bog Restoration in Ireland*. Active peat-cutting and drainage is occurring outside the south-western boundary and to the north-east of the SAC and there is a major drain running through the centre of the adjacent high bog. There is also some dumping around the site. These are all activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability. The site is being actively managed for conservation as part of the Coillte E.U. LIFE Project and most of the required restoration measures have already been carried out. However some significant threats remain and an After LIFE management plan is being developed for the future conservation management of the SAC.

Wooddown Bog SAC is a site of considerable conservation significance comprising as it does a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. This site now supports regenerating raised bog microhabitats, including hollows and wet flats, a soak system and flushes, as well as a number of scarce plant species. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of this habitat type (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.