



**Site Name: Slieve Bernagh Bog SAC**

**Site Code: 002312**

Slieve Bernagh Bog is situated to the west of Lough Derg, in the south-east of Co. Clare. The site comprises the Slieve Bernagh mountain range, with the highest peaks at Moylussa (532 m) and Cragnamurragh (526 m), and the surrounding peatlands that flank its northern slopes.

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)*

The summit plateau in Slieve Bernagh Bog SAC stretches from Lough Avullig, in the west, to Moylussa, in the east, and is dominated by mountain blanket bog of varying peat depth and condition. At the western end the terrain is undulating and some areas of peat are shallow and eroded in parts. Further east the terrain is flatter, the peat depth much greater (> 4 m) and the surface wetter. In general the vegetation is dominated by typical blanket bog species such as Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*), with local differences in soil, slope and exposure determining their relative abundance. Other frequent species in the vegetation include Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and species characteristic of mountain blanket bog such as Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*). Moss cover is variable, but in the wetter areas can be high (approx. 80% ground cover) and mainly dominated by bog mosses, such as *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. papillosum*, together with *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and occasional *Aulacomnium palustre* and *Dicranum scoparium*. Small pool systems near Moylussa contain floating carpets of *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, with patches of Common Cottongrass.

Blanket bog also occurs on the low-lying flanks of the mountain range, in the townlands of Ballybroghan and Ballydonaghan. Here the bog is much wetter, with pool systems of bog mosses, and species characteristic of western lowland blanket bog such as *Pleurozia purpurea* and *Campylopus atrovirens*.

Wet heath vegetation has developed on the slopes beneath the mountain summits and in mosaic with blanket bog on the shallower peat soils. Wet heath is especially well developed on the northern slopes below Cragnamurragh. Here the cover of Heather and Bilberry is high and a wide range of typical associates occur, including Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Cross-leaved Heath, Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Crowberry, cottongrasses, Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), sedges (*Carex binervis*, *C. panicea* and *C. echinata*), rushes (*Juncus effusus* and *J. squarrosus*). The range of moss and liverwort species in this community is exceptionally diverse and includes a number of epiphytes growing on Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*).

On the drier, south facing slopes a dry heath community occurs in mosaic with upland grassland. Here species such as Bell Heather, Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Tormentil and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) are prominent. Moss cover is low, mainly characterised by species such as *Hypnum jutlandicum*. In wetter areas, rushes (*Juncus effusus* and *J. articulatus*) become dominant.

Several species of birds, typical of open moorland, have been recorded from this site. These include Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Red Grouse, Wheatear and Raven. At least two pairs of Hen Harriers are known to occur within the Slieve Bernagh to Keeper Hill region, and birds use the cSAC for foraging habitat. This species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

The Irish Hare, a Red Data Book species, occurs within the site.

Land use within the site consists of some peat cutting to the north-west of the summit and low intensity sheep grazing confined to the lower grassy slopes. The site is, however, almost entirely surrounded by coniferous forest plantations and this remains the greatest threat.

Slieve Bernagh Bog is a site of considerable conservation importance as it contains a range of peatland types, including active blanket bog, a habitat listed with priority status under the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is one of the last remaining areas of intact open moorland habitat in this part of the country.