

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SLIEVE SNAGHT BOGS NHA

SITE CODE: 002322

Slieve Snaght Bogs NHA consists of two separate areas of blanket bog and associated habitat located on the eastern slopes of Slieve Snaght Mountain (615 m) on the Inishowen Peninsula in north Co. Donegal. It is bounded to the north by the Cashel River while the Meenyollan River forms the southern boundary. This site is a complex mosaic of intact lowland blanket bog, intact and cutover upland blanket bog, wet heath and dry heath on the slopes of Crockbrack Mountain between approximately 120 m and 200 m. Bedrock geology is quartzite.

Species recorded on blanket bog areas include Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). Mosses include hummocks of *Leucobryum glaucum* and the bog mosses *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, *S. subnitens*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. papillosum*. Bog moss cover reaches 50% in places. Lichens include *Cladonia portentosa* and *C. uncialis*.

Flora found in the flushes includes Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) and the liverwort *Pellia neesiana*.

Along the eastern boundary of the site a complex mosaic of heathy grassland, heath and relatively mineral and species-rich, quaking flushes occur. Heathy grassland/heath flora includes Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Purple Moor-grass, Cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) and Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). Mosses include *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *Hylocomium splendens* and *Polytrichum commune*.

Dry heath occurs on the rocky slopes and summit of Crockbrack Mountain. The dry heath is lightly grazed as evidenced by the high cover (95%) and height (75 cm) of Ling Heather. Other species included Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Bog Myrtle, Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Hard Fern, Velvet Bent (*Agrostis canina*) and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*).

A relatively species-rich mosaic of wet grassland occurs on the south-western side of the site. Characteristic species include Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*) and Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*). Mosses include *Polytrichum commune*, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* and *Hypnum jutlandicum*.

Common Frog, a Red Data Book species, occurs on the site.

Small areas of recently burnt blanket bog occur within the site and there are many bleached bog moss hummocks visible north of a track in the central part of this site. Nutrient-enriched disturbed areas and abandoned cars occur on either side of the track running through part of the site.

Turf cutting has been carried out in the past in the area to the north and west of Crockbrack. However the cutover is currently very wet and re-vegetated with a good bog moss cover (>50%) including *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, *S. papillosum* and *S. capillifolium*. Other mosses include *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and *Polytrichum commune*. Characteristic blanket bog species on the cutaway include Ling Heather, Deergrass, Bell Heather, Cross-leaved Heath, Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Round-leaved Sundew, Tormentil, cotton grasses (*Eriophorum vaginatum*, *E. angustifolium*) and the lichens *Cladonia uncialis* and *C. portentosa*.

The second area forming part of the Slieve Snaght Bogs NHA is an area of upland blanket bog located between the headwaters of the Evishbreedy and Meenyollan Rivers at an approximate altitude range between 212 and 242 m on quartzite geology. Characteristic blanket bog species include Deergrass, Common Cottongrass, Tormentil Bog Asphodel, Cross-leaved Heath, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* hummocks and the liverwort *Odontoschisma sphagnii*. Bog mosses include *Sphagnum subnitens* and *S. capillifolium*.

A small area of dry heath on thinner soils overlaying rocky outcrops occurs in this part of the site and is dominated by Ling Heather which reaches 80% cover and 40 cm height. Dry heath flora includes Bell Heather, Heath Rush, Common Mouse-ear, Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Heath Bedstraw, Tormentil, Velvet Bent, Bilberry, Deergrass and Crowberry and the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*. Mosses include *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *R. triquetrus* and *Polytrichum commune*.

Quaking areas and pools occur in places and these support bog mosses (*Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. cuspidatum*, *S. auriculatum*), Common Cottongrass, White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).

No recent peat cutting or overgrazing is apparent within this site. Extensive forestry has reduced the area of blanket bog in the Evishbreedy River catchment. However, apart from very localised disturbance along a track and a minor burnt although regenerating

area in the Crockbrack part of the site, and very localised poaching of the peat by sheep in the upper reaches of the Evishbreedy River, this site consists of a relatively intact mosaic of blanket bog, wet heath, dry heath and wet grassland of high conservation value. The site supports a good diversity of blanket bog microhabitats, including revegetated cutover, hummock/hollow complexes, quaking bog moss lawns and pools and flushes.

Slieve Snaght Bogs NHA is a site of considerable conservation importance containing upland and lowland blanket bog. It represents one of the most northerly blanket bog sites in Ireland. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management. Lowland blanket bog comprises less than 3% of the world's peatlands. In Europe this type of blanket bog is restricted to Ireland, Britain, Norway and Iceland. The lowland blanket bog that occurs in Ireland is considered to be an extreme hyperoceanic variant of the habitat type, found nowhere else in the world except on the coastal fringes of north-west Scotland.