

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MILLTOWNPASS BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002323

Milltownpass Bog NHA is located 1 km north-east of Milltownpass, in the townlands of Pass of Kilbride and Claremount or Cummingstown in Co. Westmeath. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog and can be accessed from the local road off the N6 to the east of the site.

This bog has pools present and is wet and quaking in places. The wet areas are formed by re-wetting of depressions on the high bog surface caused by subsidence. There is very little drainage on the high bog and no forestry. Cutover is found all around the high bog margins with encroaching scrub and a forestry plantation. Broad-leaved woodland occurs to the west of the site.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, consisting of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorium vaginatum*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). There is some encroachment by Birch (*Betula pubescens*) at the northern high bog margin with some scattered Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). In general the high bog is wet with the bog mosses *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. subnitens* and *S. papillosum* present. Other species present include Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and the lichens *Cladonia portentosa*, *C. uncialis*, *C. fimbriata*, *C. crispidata* and *C. fleurciana*. The abundance of lichens is indicative of the absence of recent burning. The vegetation is quite hummocky, due to drying out and there are old dry hummocks of Ling Heather with Cranberry and the mosses *Dicranum majus* and *Hypnum jutlandicum*. The liverwort *Odontoschisma sphagni* occurs among *Sphagnum* hummocks.

Towards the centre of the high bog there is a dry ridge dominated by Ling Heather, Bog Asphodel and Deergrass with some Cottongrass. North of this ridge there is a wet depression dominated by Ling Heather, Cottongrasses, Cross-leaved Heath and lichens. There are small pools and wet hollows with the bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and small hummocks of the bog mosses *S. papillosum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. magellanicum*. Some hollows are dominated by Bog Asphodel and the hummocks are overgrown by the liverwort *Odontoschisma sphagni*. The small pools are drying out and in-filling with Cottongrass. Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) is present along with the bog moss *Sphagnum tenellum* and large lawns of *S. magellanicum*. These occur in wet quaking areas caused by re-flooding from subsidence.

South of the ridge, the high bog slopes away towards the road and grades into a very wet and quaking area that has numerous pools and extensive lawns of bog moss (*S. magellanicum*). This area is dominated by Cottongrasses and Ling Heather over

abundant *Sphagnum*, with Bog Asphodel and White Beak-sedge dominated hollows. Large pools occur here with the bog moss *S. cuspidatum*. There are also flushed areas with the mosses *Aulacomnium palustre*, *Polytricum commune*, *P. alpestre*, the liverwort *Pleurozium schreberi* and Cranberry locally abundant.

The high bog is surrounded by cutover, much of which has been colonised by Birch (*Betula* spp.) scrub. There is old cutover to the north, with a thin margin of Birch wood. This cutover is dominated by bog species, especially Ling Heather and lichens. There is some active peat-cutting at the north-east margin, backed by Birch scrub on cutover, and to the west some of the cutover has been reclaimed for agricultural grassland. A small forestry plantation is present on cutover to the north-east and broadleaved woodland to the west adds to the habitat diversity of the site.

Current landuses on the site include peat-cutting, agriculture and forestry. To the east, outside the site, there is intensive commercial peat-cutting, but few damaging operations apart from reclamation of cutover to the west and small scale domestic peat-cutting to the east occur within the site. The heavily improved area of cutover at the western margin has been cleared of scrub, levelled and re-seeded. This reclamation directly adjoins the cutface. A new road has been built and further developments are planned. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include scrub clearance and drainage at the margins of the high bog. These activities have resulted in the loss of habitat, damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Milltownpass Bog NHA 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 supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats, including hummocks and pools and due to its easterly location, is of biogeographical importance. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.

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