



**Site Name: Knockacoller Bog SAC**

**Site Code: 002333**

Knockacoller Bog is situated approximately 2 km south-west of Castletown in Co. Laois, and lies mainly within the townlands of Butterisland, Rush Hall and Knockacoller. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.

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):

[7110] Raised Bog (Active)* [7120] Degraded Raised Bog [7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation
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Active raised bog comprises areas of high bog that are wet and actively peat-forming, where the percentage cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is high, and where some or all of the following features occur: hummocks, pools, wet flats, *Sphagnum* lawns, flushes and soaks. Degraded raised bog corresponds to those areas of high bog whose hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration. The Rhynchosporion habitat occurs in wet depressions, pool edges and erosion channels where the vegetation includes White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and/or Brown Beak-sedge (*R. fusca*), and at least some of the following associated species, Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*).

At Knockacoller Bog SAC, due to subsidence, the middle of the bog is dominated by a depression that is leading to localised re-wetting. The bog has well developed hummocks, with pools only found at its centre. Near the margins the high bog slopes significantly towards the cutover areas.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog. The site is characterised by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Deergrass-covered hummocks, with an abundance of Bog Asphodel in the hollows. Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum magellanicum* have been recorded at the site. Within the wetter central area of the bog *Sphagnum* cover increases and there are some small *S. cuspidatum* pools. The hummock forming bog mosses *S. fuscum* and *S. imbricatum* have been recorded at the site. The moss *Campylopus introflexus* occurs frequently in the north-east part of the site and is indicative of disturbance. Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) is found growing on almost all the areas of cutover. In the north of the site

regeneration of cutover is occurring with Heather-covered hummocks and pools containing the bog moss *S. cuspidatum* and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*).

Hares are commonly observed on Knockacoller Bog and Peregrine Falcons are often seen over the site.

Current land uses on the site consist of peat cutting around the margin of the high bog. Active peat cutting appears to be concentrated to the south-west, south-east and the north. Drainage ditches have been dug through the cutover at the north-east area of the site. A section of the western bog margin has been damaged recently by burning. Also along the northern margin of the site in the cutover the dumping of household refuse is occurring. All of 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. Another potentially damaging operation is a quarry towards the north-east of the cutover which may affect the hydrology of the site.

Knockacoller Bog is a site of considerable conservation significance as it comprises 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 hummock/hollow complexes, pools and regenerating cutover. Knockacoller Bog, along with the adjacent Coolrain Bog, is important because it represents the extreme southern range of the true Midland Raised Bog type. Active raised bog is listed as a priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Priority status is given to habitats and species that are threatened throughout the E.U. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of this habitat type (over 60%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.