

Site Name: Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs SAC

Site Code: 002340

This site is located on the border of Counties Meath and Westmeath, 9 km east of the town of Granard. It is situated mainly in the townlands of Clareisland or Derrymacegan, Williamstown and Moneybeg in Co. Westmeath, and Ross in Co. Meath.

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

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*).

The site consists of two lowland raised bogs at Moneybeg and Clareisland, situated on the south and south-west shores of Lough Sheelin. An important feature of these bogs is that in some areas the transition from high bog to open water is intact and not separated by cutover bog as is the case in the majority of other similar sites.

The raised bog habitat includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The high bog at Moneybeg consists of a single small dome with extensive cutover areas to the east and west. Overall the high bog is flat, with slopes associated with the southern margin. There is a wet area with a characteristic micro-topography of pools, hummocks and hollows. The local road from Mount Nugent to Finnea runs through the bog and an isolated northern section adjoins the lake shore. There is also a large mound located to the west of the high bog. The raised bog is surrounded by agricultural land, which in the east slopes steeply down to the cutover. There is forestry to the south and south-west.

The raised bog at Clareisland consists of a small, linear high bog extending along the shore of Lough Sheelin with only limited cutover areas to the east and west. There is an extensive wet area with frequent pools on the high bog and there is a slight slope towards the semi-natural lake margin. The local road described above runs by the southern margin of the high bog and there is forestry on cutover south of the road.

These high bogs have vegetation typical of Midland Raised Bog type consisting of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), White Beak-sedge and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), with Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) also present. On Moneybeg Bog, the bog mosses *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*, *S. tenellum* and *S. imbricatum* are plentiful in the extensive wet area, with many large pools lined by bog mosses, including the rare *S. fuscum*. Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) is present in some pools, along with the bog moss *S. cuspidatum*. A few of the pools are completely infilled with bog mosses and Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*).

Clareisland Bog has a semi-natural margin with Lough Sheelin and an extensive wet area with a high cover of bog mosses and pools. Most of the pools are infilling with Bog Asphodel, White Beak-sedge and bog mosses. Great Sundew and the bog moss *S. cuspidatum* occur in the pools and other bog moss species occur at the pool edges, especially *S. capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*, *S. magellanicum* and the rare *S. fuscum*. The lichen *Cladonia portentosa* is common, along with Bog-rosemary and Cranberry growing through the bog mosses. The semi-natural margin is dominated by tall Heather with lush carpets of the moss *Hypnum jutlandicum* and large hummocks of the bog moss *S. capillifolium*. There are many deep cracks in the peat due to subsidence at the lake margin. A thin margin of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) scrub occurs at the lake edge.

At Moneybeg Bog there are extensive areas of cutover to the east and west, which have some active peat-cutting. Sections of old cutover are dominated by Heather, Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Gorse scrub. These areas are bordered by Birch scrub and woodland. Across the road on the slope to the lake there is old cutover dominated by Purple Moor-grass grading into Birch scrub at the shoreline. The presence of a large wooded mound, which may be man-made in origin adds to the interest of this raised bog. At Clareisland Bog there are abandoned peat-cuttings in the north-west dominated by Heather and to the east there is cutover dominated by Purple Moor-grass with encroaching Gorse scrub.

Land use at Moneybeg Bog includes active peat-cutting to the east and west and forestry along the western margin. Current land use at Clareisland Bog includes peat-cutting to the west and north-west of the high bog and forestry along the southern margin. Damaging activities associated with these land uses include drainage and burning. Drainage has occurred on these high bogs in the past and at Moneybeg Bog there is evidence of recent and frequent burning of the high bog. These activities have resulted in habitat loss and damage to the hydrological status, and pose a continuing threat to the viability of these high bogs.

The Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs site is of considerable conservation significance as it comprises two raised bogs with semi-natural lake margins. These are found at the north-eastern extreme of the range of raised bogs in Ireland. Active raised bog is a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The site supports a diversity of raised bog habitats including hummock/hollows and pools. 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 type (over 60%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.