

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: COAN BOGS NHA

SITE CODE: 002382

Coan Bogs NHA consists of two small areas of upland blanket bog located to the east of Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny. The first bog lies in the townland of Coan East, 2.5 km to the north-east of Coan village at the altitude 270 m to 281 m. The second bog is situated 3 km to the north-west of Coan village in the townland of Smithstown. It lies at an altitude of 240 m. Bedrock geology for both areas is shale overlain locally by glacial till. Blanket bog vegetation is well developed in central areas of both bogs although cutover surrounds them. Plantation forestry also surrounds the sites.

Vegetation on the eastern bog is characterised by tall Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and lichen *Cladonia portentosa*. Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) is also common. There are large hummocks of bog mosses *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. subnitens*. Hollows containing some *S. papillosum* are dominated by Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), a species more characteristic of raised bogs, is also present and Bilberry (*V. myrtillus*) occurs on larger hummocks along with the moss *Hypnum jutlandicum*. Further east the bog becomes wetter with up to 60% bog moss cover. In this wet area Cranberry is abundant and another characteristic raised bog species, Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) occurs.

The western bog is also dominated by Ling Heather, Crossed-leaved Heath and Hare's-tail Cottongrass with some Bog Asphodel. Bog moss cover reaches 80% and moss *Hypnum jutlandicum* and Lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) also occur. Bog-rosemary and Round-leaved Sundew are also present. This bog becomes drier in the south with Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) more prevalent. Bog Asphodel occurs on bare peat by the southern cutover.

The cutover around the eastern bog is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) with clear-felled plantations at the margins. Cutover on the northern side is planted with new conifer forest. Wet cutover on the eastern side is dominated by Purple Moor-grass with Ling Heather, Bilberry, the moss *Polytrichum commune* and scattered Willow (*Salix* spp.).

The western bog has cutover dominated by Birch (*Betula* spp.) scrub to the east and south and new plantation forest to the west.

Current landuse on the margins of the western bog consists of mechanical peat-cutting and planting of conifer forest. There is some encroachment of conifer seedlings onto both bogs from surrounding forestry. These activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological condition of both areas, pose a continuing threat to their conservation.

Coan Bogs NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance consisting of upland blanket bog. This site, although small, is undisturbed and shows good characteristics of blanket bog with some raised bog indicator species. 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.

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