

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CROAGHMOYLE MOUNTAIN NHA

SITE CODE: 002383

Croaghmoyle Mountain NHA is an extensive area of upland blanket bog, with heath, cliff and freshwater habitats. It is located about 8 km north-west of Castlebar, Co. Mayo and situated within the townlands of Beltra, Boleyglass, Cuilmullagh, Burren, Doogary and Kilhale and Knockbaun. The site extends from Barnageehy or Windy Gap in the north-east, to the lower slopes of Birreen Hill in the south-west, and takes in the two main summits in the area (Burren Rock and Croaghmoyle). The majority of the southern and south-western margins of the site are bounded by forestry. The bedrock geology is sandstone and granite, overlain with areas of sandstone glacial till. Outcrops of conglomerate rock occur at the summits of the mountains. The site spans a considerable altitude range (150 m to 430 m).

Blanket bog is found throughout the site with peat generally greater than 2 m deep and with good bog moss and heather cover. Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) reaches 40% cover and 30 cm in height in places. Other species present include Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), and lichens (*Cladonia portentosa* and *C. uncialis*). Mosses include *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and *Sphagnum* species. Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and occasional Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) occur on the flat terrain in the south-western part of Burren Rock.

Flushes are frequent at the base of the rocky southern slopes of Croaghmoyle. Species here include Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Forget-me-not (*Myosotis* spp.), Water Starwort (*Callitriche* spp.), Bog Pimpernel, Eyebright (*Euphrasia* spp.), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), rushes (*Juncus articulatus* and *J. acutiflorus*) and a diverse range of mosses (*Drepanocladus revolvens*, *Polytrichum commune*, *Calliargon* spp., *Philonotis fontana* and *Sphagnum* spp.).

Both the summits of Croaghmoyle Mountain and Burren Rock have cliff-faces derived from ice movement during the ice age. These cliffs provide a niche for several rare or uncommon plants that are characteristic of arctic/alpine habitats. At Burren Rock these include Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*), Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) and Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*). More common species found at Burren Rock are Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*), Buckler Ferns (*Dryopteris dilatata* and *D. aemula*) and spleenworts (*Asplenium trichomanes* and *A. adiatum-nigrum*), as well as Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). Species found on the Croaghmoyle cliff include New Zealand Willowherb (*Epilobium brunnescens*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex*

binervis) and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*). There is a diverse lower plant cover including *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and the lichen *Cladonia subcervicornis*. The neighbouring hillslopes support heath vegetation, with some patches of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) on the western slopes of Croaghmoyle.

Red Grouse, a Red Data Book species, occurs within the site.

Current landuse within the site is mainly sheep grazing. The intensity of this has caused loss of vegetation cover and resulted in some areas with up to fifty percent exposed peat. Other land uses around the periphery of the site include forestry, peat cutting and wind power and telecommunications installations. These developments have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the ecological and hydrological status of the site and pose a potential threat to its conservation prospects.

Croaghmoyle Mountain NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It includes an extensive area of upland blanket bog, a range of associated upland habitats and important arctic/alpine plant communities on the cliffs. 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.