

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: INAGH BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002391

Inagh Bog NHA is an area of upland blanket bog approximately 4 km south-south-east of Belderg and 8 km west-south-west of Ballycastle, in north Co. Mayo. The site is located in the townlands of Inagh and Lugnalettin. It lies within 5 km of the Atlantic Ocean and is situated on the southern side of the Maumakeogh plateau and has an altitudinal range of about 130 m at its southernmost part, to a peak of 365 m at its northernmost part. The site extends along a north-south axis for approximately 4 km and for most of its length is about 1.5 km in width. It is surrounded by conifer plantation except on the northern boundary which coincides with a section of the southern boundary of the Glenamoy Bog Complex candidate Special Area of Conservation. Bedrock geology is metamorphic sediments (quartzites mainly) but also includes sandstones and limestones (the latter may give rise to base-rich flushes).

The site includes a variety of blanket bog habitats including lowland, mountain and a type transitional between the two. The blanket bog within the site can be divided into two basic types: wet, deep blanket bog on flat to gently sloping ground and shallower, drier blanket bog on the steeper slopes and mountain ridges. Below an altitude of approximately 200 m, most of the bog occurs as relatively deep and sometimes quaking peat on flat to gently sloping ground. In these areas, the dominant species in the vegetation are generally Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and bog moss (*Sphagnum capillifolium*). Other species here include White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), the liverwort (*Pleurozia purpurea*), Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and the mosses *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. cuspidatum* and *Campylopus atrovirens*.

The highest quality deep blanket peat is to be found in the south-eastern corner of the site where a number of small pool areas and hummock/hollow systems are present. In the wettest areas there is a quaking scraw development. This area also contains numerous low hummocks dominated by the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and a few small swallow holes. Blanket bog in the south-western corner of the site is relatively dry due to higher levels of grazing and perhaps burning in the recent past.

Above an elevation of approximately 200 m, the terrain is generally relatively steeply sloping and the peat is shallower. Here the vegetation is dominated by Purple Moor-grass, Ling Heather, Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) with plant species indicative of high-level conditions such as Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). In many places, this drier type of blanket bog has been subject to heavy grazing by sheep and has led to peat erosion. There is also localised replacement by dry and wet heath vegetation on heavily eroded blanket bog areas.

The site also contains a range of other upland habitats that are intact and of high quality. These include dry and wet heath, small streams and the Inagh River, flushes, regenerating cutover bog, upland grassland on mineral soil, exposed rock and small cliffs.

A number of Irish Red Data Book species have been recorded from the site. These include Golden Plover, which are confirmed as breeding within the site, Red Grouse, Irish Hare, Common Frog and Common Lizard.

Inagh Bog NHA is situated in a landscape dominated by blanket bog, though significant portions of adjacent areas are now planted with commercial forestry. The site itself is only used for sheep and occasional cattle grazing. Burning in the recent past has damaged sections of the south-eastern part of the site. There are a small number of abandoned farm buildings and semi-improved fields in the south-central part of the site. The main threats are from grazing, burning, drainage, further afforestation and potentially renewable energy development, in particular wind power installations and associated infrastructure.

Inagh Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation value as it contains an extensive area of undisturbed upland blanket bog habitat. 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.