

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LEAHILL BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002417

Leahill Bog NHA is an area of lowland blanket bog located approximately 7 km south-west of Glengarriff, in west Co. Cork. It is situated within the townlands of Leahill, Curragh East, Derreenacarrin and Derrylough between the main road from Glengarriff to Adrigole. The bog is bounded for the most part by roads and small streams while the south-eastern boundary cuts across the lower slopes of Knockacarrin Hill. The site includes an altitude range of between 30 m to 110 m and bedrock geology is Old Red Sandstone.

The site contains a good example of lowland blanket bog with hummocks, hollows and pools. It also has areas of re-vegetated cutover bog, outcropping rock, wet heath, dry heath, cutover ponds, several small lakes (e.g. Lough More and Lough Beg) and areas of scrub woodland. Much of the remaining intact blanket peat is contained between low ridges of outcropping rock, resulting in small 'lenses' of bog, separated by rocky ledges.

Extensive flushed areas in the northern part of the site are dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). A stream along the northern boundary supports a population of the internationally important Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*).

Areas of intact blanket bog are characterised by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). The moss *Campylopus atrovirens* and purple liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea*, which are blanket bog indicator species, are common. Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) also occurs in places and hummocks of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are frequent.

Small pools are common while larger, more open pools with small islands occur in one location. Within and around the pools, bog mosses are abundant including *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, *S. auriculatum*, *S. papillosum* and *S. magellanicum*. Also present are two sundews, Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*). White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and the less commonly occurring Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora fusca*) are found in wet, moss-filled hollows. Dragonflies and damselflies are abundant around the pools.

Close to the road that forms the southern boundary, deep water occurs in large, square cutover ponds. The ponds are partly colonised by floating White Water-lily (*Nymphaea alba*) and Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*). The edges have re-vegetated with Common Reed.

The areas of regenerated cutover bog are moss rich. Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) are common in these areas with frequent occurrences of Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*). Wetter, quaking areas also occur, being the remains of cut-away hollows or pools that have regenerated. Such areas are dominated by White Beak-sedge, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Black Bog-rush and bog mosses such as *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, *S. auriculatum*, *S. subnitens* and *S. papillosum*. Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*), Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) are frequent while Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*) occur in standing water.

On the rocky outcrops between the lenses of peat, a mosaic of wet and dry heath vegetation occurs. Common species in these areas include Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Purple Moor-grass, Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*) and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*).

Land use over much of the site is not intensive. While cattle lightly graze much of the northern section, there is little evidence of over-grazing or burning. Also, given the wet, rocky nature of most of the site, forestry plantation does not pose a serious threat. While an area of recent cutting has been excluded from the southern part of the site, this damage has the potential to affect the drainage of the adjacent, intact bog, causing the peat to dry out. There is also the possibility that cutting could encroach onto the site.

Leahill Bog NHA is a lowland blanket bog of considerable conservation value occurring at the southernmost range of blanket bog distribution in the Northern Hemisphere. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions with cool, wet, oceanic climates at temperate latitudes. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. Lowland blanket bog comprises less than 3% of the world's peatlands. In Europe, this type of blanket bog is restricted to Ireland, Britain, Norway and Iceland. The lowland bog that occurs in Ireland is considered to be an extremely hyperoceanic variant of the habitat type, found nowhere else in the world except on the coastal fringes of north-west Scotland.