

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: OUGHTERARD DISTRICT BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002431

Oughterard District Bog NHA contains a relatively large area of lowland and upland blanket bog extending from Corkernarusheeny in the north to Uggool in the south. It is located to the south-west of Oughterard, Co. Galway. The altitude range is between 80 m and 291 m. Bedrock geology is granite and sandstone, overlain in places by shallow glacial till.

The site consists of a number of hills, Clooshgreen, Knocknalee and Luggakeeraunin. In between the hills are stream corridors, flushed areas, lakes and pool systems. Heath is present on the slopes of some of the hills.

Much of the site has typical blanket bog vegetation, consisting of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and occasional Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). Hummocks of moss species *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and *Camplyopus atrovirens* occur. Bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) form a spongy mat in places and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) occur in abundance. There are wetter areas where the bog mosses increase cover up to fifty percent and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) becomes more dominant.

The areas of quaking bog have a characteristic hummock and hollow topography. The hummocks are formed of bog mosses including *S. papillosum* and *S. capillifolium*. Extensive lawns of bog mosses, *Pleurozium schreberi*, White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and cottongrasses dominate the hollows. A flush area at the northern part of the site consists of a depression with open water, the margins of which are infilling with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). Other species present in the margins include Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), Black Bog-rush, Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).

A pool system occurs at the southern part of the site. Bog Asphodel and White Beak-sedge occur on the flats where the water level has dropped. Bogbean and algae dominate the pools. The cover of bog mosses is good on the margins of the pools and hummocks are dominated by the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* along with Ling Heather and Cross-leaved Heath.

Red Grouse, a Red Data Book species, has been recorded on the site.

Current landuse on the site consists of mechanical peat cutting and grazing. Forestry occurs adjacent to the site. Damaging activities associated with these land uses include drainage and periodic burning of the bog. Some areas are heavily grazed by sheep and cattle and are poached and bare. These developments have resulted in loss

of habitat and have impacted on the bog's hydrology. They may continue to pose a threat to the site's conservation prospects.

Oughterard District Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It contains upland and lowland blanket bog features including pools, flushes and areas of heath. 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. 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 blanket bog that occurs in Ireland is considered to be an extreme hyperoceanic variant of the habitat type, found nowhere else in the world except on the coastal fringes of north-west Scotland.