SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CROCKAUNS/KEELOGYBOY BOGS NHA

SITE CODE: 002435

Crockauns/Keelogyboy Bogs NHA is an extensive, primarily upland site incorporating large areas of blanket bog, heath, upland grassland and associated habitats. It is located 7 km north-east of Sligo town. The site extends over 6 km east to west and encompasses Cope's, Crockauns and Keelogyboy Mountains and also parts of Hangman's Hill. The range in elevation within the site is between 65 m and 463 m. Bedrock geology is primarily limestone including fossiliferous reef and siliceous limestone.

The site consists of a series of relatively flat-topped mountains supporting upland blanket bog, heath, exposed rock and upland grassland. The site margins feature steep to vertical exposed cliffs and limestone scree. A variety of habitats occur on more gentle slopes including lowland blanket bog, wet heath, wet grassland, woodland and scrub.

Upland blanket bog largely occurs within a mosaic of heath and upland grassland habitats and is the dominant habitat on broad plateaux, on saddle areas and in small basins located between steep slopes. The most extensive areas occur between Cope's Mountain and Crockauns Mountain with smaller areas in the interior of Keelogyboy. Many areas of blanket bog occur at stream rises. Lowland blanket bog occurs in a large watershed between Crockauns and Keelogyboy and generally supports wetter and slightly deeper, peat than the upland areas.

In upland areas the blanket bog vegetation is dominated by Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus caespitosus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), with frequent hummocks of moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and abundant lichens (*Cladonia* spp.). Small to medium-sized pools and associated flushes occur locally in mountain saddle areas. Bog-pools contain bog mosses (*Sphagnum auriculatum, S. cuspidatum, S. recurvum*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). Quaking lawns of bog moss and Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) occur locally. Surrounding areas also feature damp, but drying out, interconnecting pools and wet flats. Swallowholes are frequent. Erosion features of deep peat such as peat haggs and bare peat gullies are common in summit areas.

Areas of heath habitat are characterized by tall Ling Heather, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Common Cottongrass, some Purple Moor-grass, Green-ribbed sedge (*Carex binervis*) and Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*). Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and occasional Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) also occur.

The site also contains a wide range of other habitats, including good examples of limestone pavement, calcareous scree, upland grassland on mineral and peaty soils, rivers and streams and small areas of semi-natural woodland. The steep cliffs and limestone scree support pockets of alpine vegetation with species of interest including the rare Yellow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga aizoides*) and the scarce Mossy Saxifrage (*S. hyponides)* as well as a diverse moss and liverwort flora. On the north-west side of the site, at the base of cliffs and scree slopes, small areas of broadleaved woodland occur supporting Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) as well as the scarce species Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*). This area also supports a diverse community of mosses.

Scarce species such as Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria albicans*) and Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) can be found in the patches of species-rich, upland dry grassland and wet grassland within the site. There are also areas of well-revegetated, cutover bog, on peat of up to 2 m deep, on the lower slopes of Keelogyboy.

The site supports several Irish Red Data book species including Chough, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon and Red Grouse.

Landuse within the site is predominantly sheep grazing. Most areas have been somewhat modified by grazing, with localised areas degraded by overgrazing, particularly on Keelogyboy and the western side of Cope's Mountain. However, recent destocking is reported to have taken place on some parts of the site and habitat recovery is possible if de-stocking continues. Development of wind farms, drainage and further afforestation are also potential threats to the site. Large areas of forestry have been developed on the northern side of Crockauns and on the western and southern sides of Keelogyboy, adjacent to the site. Recent drainage has occurred within one of the most intact areas of blanket bog habitat within the site. Quarrying is also a potential threat, particularly in relation to potential expansion of the existing quarries on north side of Cope's and Crockauns Mountains.

Crockauns/Keelogyboy Bogs NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It contains extensive areas of blanket bog, heath, upland grassland and associated habitats. 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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