

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: OYSTERMAN'S MARSH NHA

SITE CODE: 002439

Oysterman's Marsh NHA contains lowland blanket bog and associated habitats, including a large freshwater reed swamp, and is located east of the Gort-Ennis road, approximately 8 km north-east of Ennis, Co. Clare. It lies within the townlands of Derryvet, Drumbonniv, Knockreddan, Knockaloaghan and Derrymore. The site is bounded to the north, south and west by enclosed agricultural land; to the east by coniferous forestry plantations and minor roads. The altitude range within the site is between 60 m and 82 m. The eastern part of the site overlies limestone, but the rest overlies shales, sandstones and slate over an older bedrock of Old Red Sandstone.

The site consists of two basins separated by a central ridge of low hills that run north-east to south-west. The hills support semi-natural oak/holly/birch woodland, Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub and some semi-improved grassland. The basin to the west contains two lakes, Derrynacragg Lough and Knockreddan Lough, which are surrounded by blanket bog that is locally quaking. To the east of the central wooded ridge, lies an extensive freshwater reed swamp adjoining, to the west, low hills supporting semi-natural oak woodland.

There is a quaking area of bog close to Knockreddan Lough with open water on the bog surface between hummocks. Species associated with these hummocks are Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Bog Mosses (*Sphagnum* species). Other species found in this wet area include Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Bog Moss (*Sphagnum auriculatum*), Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and horsetails (*Equisetum* spp.). Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) is limited to hummock tops. Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) occurs by a small stand of birch trees (*Betula* sp.). Knockreddan Lough is fringed by a zone of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*).

Blanket bog also occurs between Derrynacragg Lough and Knockreddan Lough and in this area is fringed by a margin of Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), willows (*Salix* spp.), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). The bog itself is characterized by Ling Heather, Bog Myrtle, tussocks of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Common Cottongrass, Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Cross-leaved Heath and Bog Aphodel.

Regenerating cutover bog occurs south of Knockreddan Lough, close to the trackway. The cutover supports vegetation dominated by Cross-leaved Heath with Bog Asphodel, Ling Heather, Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Common Cottongrass and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*).

Current landuse on the site includes grazing and burning. Grazing and poaching by cattle is evident near Knockreddan Lough and along the fringes of Oysterman's Marsh itself. Agricultural grasses, notably Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), are appearing on the bog surface as a result of this grazing activity. Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Birch are colonising the bog surface in places. Gorse scrub on the central ridge is invading old field systems and burning to clear it is a serious threat to the deciduous woodland. A conifer plantation encroaches on the western and northern sides of Oysterman's Marsh. Elsewhere, felling of wood is occurring adjacent to the site. New fencing is being erected throughout the site. Scrub and young broadleaf trees are being cleared to make way for this fencing along the original track. The land west of Oysterman's Marsh has been afforested and this may impact on the hydrology of the Knockreddan Lough area.

Oysterman's Marsh NHA is a site of considerable conservation importance. It supports a wide diversity of habitats including a significant area of lowland blanket bog. 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 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.