

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MAGHERA MOUNTAIN BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002442

Maghera Mountain Bog NHA is a cluster of upland blanket bogs situated approximately 16 km south of Gort, in Co. Clare. It consists of three bog areas and lies almost entirely within the townlands of Maghera, Liss, Corbehagh, Killanena, Ballycroum and Gortnamearacaun. In all three areas, the bog is bounded by either conifer plantation or enclosed agricultural land with rushy pasture. In Gortnamearacaun the East Clare Way passes through the site while at Ballycroum the Mid Clare Way passes through the site. Altitude range is between 200 m and 360 m. Bedrock geology consists of Old Red Sandstone.

The site includes intermediate blanket bog in the townland of Gortnamearacaun with areas of regenerating cutover bog with willow and birch scrub vegetation at the bog margins. The site at Gortnamearacaun is drained by ditches that are infilling with bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). The Ballycroum site contains a mosaic of intermediate blanket bog with heath. Parts of the Ballycroum site have been cutover but are regenerating. Other habitats include scrub, heath, rushy pasture, cutover and regenerating blanket bog.

Blanket bog vegetation is dominated by Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) on deep peat. There are occasional tussocks of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Hummocks of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are abundant growing with Ling Heather, the lichen *Cladonia portentosa*, Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) and Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*). Other hummocks, characterized by *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and the Bog Moss *Sphagnum capillifolium*, are also common. There are also lawns or wet hollows dominated by Deergrass with Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and lichen (*Cladonia uncialis*). The liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea* and bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. recurvum* are also present.

At the Gortnamearacaun site the vegetation is characterized by a raised dome of quaking, soft peat dominated by Ling Heather. Other species noted in this vegetation include Deergrass, Purple Moor-Grass, Bog Asphodel and the liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea*. Wet, infilled hollows are vegetated with Bog Asphodel, Common Cottongrass and occasional cushions of lichen (*Cladonia portentosa*). Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) is found growing on hummocks of Bog Moss (*Sphagnum capillifolium*) with Ling Heather, Heath Milkwort, Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and tussocks of Hare's-tail Cottongrass. The hollows on this bog have a very thin, fragile scraw-vegetated surface characterized by Bog Asphodel, Cross-leaved Heath, Carnation Sedge and Common Cottongrass. Hummocks of *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are present together with other mosses (*Sphagnum* spp. and *Hypnum jutlandicum*) and lichens (*Cladonia portentosa* and *Cladonia uncialis*).

At the Ballycroum site the vegetation consists of a mosaic of regenerating blanket bog and heath dominated by Ling Heather with Purple Moor-grass and Deergrass. The main moss is *Hypnum jutlandicum* and additional species include Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Cross-leaved Heath, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bog Moss (*Sphagnum subnitens*), cottongrasses and Heath Milkwort. There are wet hollows filled with blanket bog species such as *Sphagnum* species, Common Cottongrass and Cross-leaved Heath. Bog Asphodel also occurs and the lichen *Cladonia portentosa* occurs on hummocks of *Sphagnum capillifolium*. Old cutover areas are infilling and completely dominated by bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). Occasional willow (*Betula* sp.) scrub occurs throughout the site.

A small headwater flush is found on Maghera Mountain with species such as Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Purple Moor-grass, Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and occasional Tormentil.

Three Red Data book species, Red Grouse, Irish Hare and Otter, have been recorded on the site.

Current landuse on the site consists of grazing, peat extraction and recreational walking. Along the access road to Maghera Mountain there is extensive quarrying of shale. There are also many dismantled diggers, large tractors, construction vehicles and lorries dumped along this track. Around the access track there is extensive sausage machine extraction of peat and the mountain area has been burnt and grazed by sheep. Ballycroum is also used as an amenity area and megalithic tombs add further interest to the site. It is located along the East Clare Walking route. Some trampling associated with the walking route is evident. The site is grazed by cattle and poaching is apparent in places.

Maghera Mountain Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It supports a diversity of habitats including upland blanket bog, heath, flush and scrub. Blanket bog is the dominant habitat. It is locally deep and quaking and has features transitional to raised bog. 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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