

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BLEANBEG BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002450

Bleanbeg Bog NHA consists primarily of upland blanket bog and is located approximately 7 km east of Newport in south Tipperary. The site is situated in the townlands of Bleanbeg, Glencroe, Fiddane and Castlewaller. It incorporates a broad plateau of upland blanket bog habitat that grades into heath, upland grassland on peaty soil, and cutover bog. The western boundary of the site is defined by the transition from intact blanket bog to cutover bog, while the northern, eastern and southern sides of the site are bounded by conifer plantation. The site lies between 260 m and 368 m above sea level and is underlain by bedrock of Old Red Sandstone.

The vegetation in this extensive, rather flat expanse of upland blanket bog is dominated by Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum angustifolium* and *E. vaginatum*) with frequent Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), low Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and occasional Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). The canopy, which is up to 40 cm in height, is rather uniform, but shows little signs of grazing. A moss understorey, consisting of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) and other mosses (*Campylopus* spp., *Hypnum jutlandicum*), is present over the majority of the bog, but some patches of bare peat occur. Lichens (*Cladonia portentosa*, *C. ciliata*) and liverworts (*Odontoschisma sphagnii*, *Diplophyllum albicans*) are common.

A number of dried-out pool systems occur. These are characterised by bare peat, with Bog Asphodel and the moss *Campylopus atrovirens*. Around the margins of these areas, there are well-developed hummocks formed mainly by the moss *Breutelia chrysocoma* with some bog moss (*S. subnitens*, *S. tenellum*). Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) is also present in these hummock/hollow areas. On a prominent hill in the middle of the site, blanket bog grades into upland grassland dominated by Purple Moor-grass. Upland grassland is also common on the lower slopes below the blanket bog, together with patches of wet heath vegetation and narrow flushes.

Several Red Data Book species, including Red Grouse and Irish Hare, have been recorded on the site. A pair of Hen Harriers, also a Red Data Book species, nest within 1 km of the site and are known to forage over the site.

There is little current landuse within intact parts of the blanket bog, apart from light to moderate sheep grazing. On the margins of the bog, there is some machine and hand cutting of turf for domestic purposes. Sausage machine cutting and associated drainage works and machine tracks have damaged small areas of the bog surface on the north-western and north-eastern edges of the site. Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) saplings are also invading the bog margins.

Bleanbeg Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It contains important areas of upland blanket bog together with upland grassland and heath 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. This site is also important for a number of Red Data Book species.

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