

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUGH HILL BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002452

Lough Hill Bog NHA is an upland blanket bog located just north of Barnesmore Gap, 10m north-east of Donegal town, in south-east Co. Donegal. The site, which lies within the townland of Croaghonagh, is situated on a broad hilltop known as Lough Hill. This hill slopes gently westwards to the shores of Lough Mourne and southwards to the Mourne Beg River. The northern and southern sides of the site are bounded by conifer plantation, while the western and eastern site boundaries are defined by the transition from intact blanket bog to re-vegetating cutover bog and rough grassland. The site occurs at an elevation of between 190 m and 221 m and is underlain by granite and metamorphosed sediments.

The north-western and eastern side of the site contain an area of very wet to quaking blanket bog with extensive tear pool and hummock/hollow systems. This part of the site is quite undisturbed by grazing or human activities, such as burning, drainage or peat cutting. The blanket bog vegetation comprises a deep canopy of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) with species-rich moss cover formed of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) and other mosses (*Racomitrium lanuginosum*, *Breutelia chrysocoma*). Up to 50% of this intact area is quaking bog with extensive inter-connecting pool systems and a well developed hummock-hollow microtopography. The pool margins are colonised by quaking lawns of bog mosses, White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). Lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) are abundant.

The western and south-western parts of the site contain cutover bog that has not been worked for many years and is regenerating well. The vegetation is dominated by Ling Heather and Purple Moor-Grass with an intact cover of mosses. There are also occasional flushes characterised by Purple Moor-grass. Several large drainage ditches occur in the north-eastern parts of the site, but these are now almost wholly re-vegetated by characteristic blanket bog species.

While the western side of the site is grazed by sheep, most of the interior and eastern side of the site is unaffected by grazing. There are no other activities disturbing the vegetation in these areas. There is a small amount of active mechanical peat-cutting within the site. The main threats to the site are from damaging activities associated with forestry development and peat extraction, particularly compaction from vehicular access, drainage works, burning and dumping.

A number of Irish Red Data Book species, including Hen Harrier, Golden Plover, Red Grouse and Badger, have been recorded on the site. Pools within the site host a diverse dragonfly fauna.

Lough Hill Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance supporting upland blanket 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. This site also supports several Red Data Book species.