

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MEENMORE WEST BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002453

Meenmore West Bog NHA is an area of upland blanket bog located 4 km west of Fintown, in central Co. Donegal. The site is situated on the south-eastern slopes of Croaghleheen Mountain and lies within the townlands of Meenmore West, Drumaneany, Clogherachullion and Lougherrig. The southern boundary is defined by the Glenleheen River and by fences separating blanket bog habitat from agricultural and grazing lands. The northern boundary is defined by a narrow ridge just south of the peak of Croaghleheen. A young conifer plantation forms part of the north-western boundary, while the eastern and western sides of the site are defined by streams, fences and other features separating blanket bog habitat from other more intensely managed agricultural lands. The altitude range of the site is between 150 m and 385 m. Bedrock geology consists of granite.

The blanket bog is largely intact and only lightly grazed by sheep. The lower slopes are somewhat uniform, possibly due to burning in the past. The middle to higher slopes and western sides of the site are typified by thinner blanket bog with frequent exposed rock and patches of dry and wet heath. Bare peat gullies, peat haggings and eroded plateau areas are common at higher elevations.

The blanket bog vegetation comprises a tall and relatively ungrazed canopy dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), with occasional to frequent Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). Some cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and a very low cover of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) are also present. Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) and Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) are also locally frequent. The ground flora consists of bog mosses (*Sphagnum subnitens*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*) and other mosses (*Racomitrium lanuginosum*, *Breutelia chrysocoma*), with frequent patches of the moss *Campylopus atrovirens*. There are occasional low hummocks. In wet flats, small pools and bare peat, hollows occur with quaking lawns of bog mosses (*Sphagnum auriculatum*, *S. cuspidatum*, *S. compactum*), as well as Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bog Asphodel, Purple Moor-grass and abundant lichens (*Cladonia uncialis*, *C. portentosa*).

Dry heath vegetation characterised by Ling Heather, Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) occurs on exposed knolls and drier hills. There are also numerous channels and small streams. Where the gradient lessens at breaks in slopes, small flushed basins occur, containing some quaking, iron-rich flushes and fens surrounded by wet grassland. The vegetation in these areas is characterised by species such as Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Devil's-bit

Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), with an understorey of feather mosses (*Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum palustre*. There is also a small oligotrophic lake, Lough Nacroagh, at the north-west corner of the site.

Limited sheep grazing is the only current landuse on the site. There are some very small areas of cutover peat with a few associated drains, but these have not been worked for many years. The uniformity of the vegetation, particularly on lower slopes, suggests that burning may have been carried out on the site in the past.

Meenmore West Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance containing a large 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.