

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MULLAGHANISH TO MUSHERAMORE MOUNTAINS SPA

SITE CODE: 004162

The Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA comprises a substantial part of the Boggeragh/Derrynasaggart Mountains in Co. Cork. It is divided roughly into two sectors by the R582 road between Macroom and Millstreet. Most of the site is over 200 m in altitude, rising to heights of 475 m in the eastern sector (Musherabeg) and 462 m in the western sector (Knockullane). Several important rivers rise within the site, notably the Foherish and Awboy. The site is underlain by Old Red Sandstone.

The site consists of a variety of upland habitats, though approximately one-third is afforested. The coniferous forests include first and second rotation plantations, with both pre-thicket and post-thicket stands present. The principal tree species present are Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*). Almost one-third of the site is unplanted blanket bog and heath, with both wet and dry heaths present. The vegetation is characterised by such species as Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). The remainder of the site is mostly rough grassland that is used for hill farming. This varies in composition and includes some wet areas with rushes (*Juncus* spp.) and some areas subject to scrub encroachment.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for Hen Harrier.

This site is a stronghold for Hen Harrier. A survey in 2005 recorded 5 pairs, which represents over 2% of the all-Ireland total. A similar number had been recorded in the 1998-2000 period. The mix of forestry and open areas provides optimum habitat conditions for this rare bird, which is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The early stages of new and second-rotation conifer plantations are the most frequently used nesting sites, though some pairs may still nest in tall heather of unplanted bogs and heath. Hen Harriers will forage up to c. 5 km from the nest site, utilising open bog and moorland, young conifer plantations and hill farmland that is not too rank. Birds will often forage in openings and gaps within forests. In Ireland, small birds and small mammals appear to be the most frequently taken prey.

The site also supports a breeding population of Merlin. The population size is not well known but is likely to be one or two pairs.

The site is of ornithological importance because it provides excellent nesting and foraging habitat for breeding Hen Harrier. The presence of two species, Hen Harrier, and Merlin, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive is of note.

25.1.2012