

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CASTLE FFRENCH WEST BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 000280

Castle ffrench West Bog is a small raised bog situated about 7 km south-west of Ballyforan. It is located mainly in the townlands of Castle ffrench West, Gowla and Loonaghtan, in east County Galway. It is accessible from local roads and forestry tracks to the east and west.

The site is a raised bog consisting of areas of both high bog and cutover. The high bog is divided into two parts - an eastern, low quality part with tear pools and the western two-thirds, which is of good quality with a high dome. The two are connected by a very narrow strip of high bog and a ridge of mineral soil with cutover on both sides. About 10 ha. (or 25%) of the western section is extremely wet and quaking. Part of this consists of large, inter-connecting pools with low flat 'lawns' between. The rest of this wet area is a wooded flush. The narrow strip of high bog has been planted with conifers and there is also forestry on cutaway to the north and west. There is some wet regenerating cutover to the south-west.

The high bog has vegetation typical of a Western Raised Bog, dominated by Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), with the moss *Campylopus atrovirens*, liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea* and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) occurring quite commonly. Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) is present but not dominant on the high bog and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) is common in places. The eastern section has poor bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.) cover and only relic pools. The western section has a wet and quaking area with large, inter-connecting pools containing the bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, and low flat lawns in between. Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) grows very vigorously here. However, due to burning bog moss cover on these lawns is poor and they are dominated by Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). To the north these pools grade into a wooded flush, which is quaking and which supports Scot's Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) trees, some of which are quite mature, over a thick mat of vegetation. This vegetation includes an abundance of Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and Cranberry as well as Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and other species including bog mosses and orchids (*Dactylorhiza* spp.).

The cutover to the south-west is very wet and regenerating, with good bog moss growth, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and abundant Cranberry. The mosses, *Calliergon cuspidatum* and *Aulacomnium palustre* are also present. The short mineral ridge in the centre of the site is dominated by Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). This ridge extends under the thin section of the high bog.

Current landuse on the site consists of forestry, agricultural reclamation of old cutover and mechanical peat-cutting to the east and south. Damaging activities associated

with these include drainage and burning with large portions of the bog being burnt at regular intervals. These activities have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Castle ffrench West Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance, comprising as it does, a raised bog, a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The site supports a range of raised bog habitats including a pool system and a wooded flush. This bog although small and damaged by extensive cutover and burning, is unusual in having such a relatively large area of wet quaking habitat. The presence of the wooded flush adds to the conservation value of the site. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 50%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.