

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: RAFORD RIVER BOG NHA**

**SITE CODE: 000321**

Raford River Bog NHA is located approximately 3 km north-west of Bellafa (Ballyfa), mainly in the townlands of Cloonbenes, Crossmacrin and Derrynamagh in Co. Galway. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog. The site is bounded in the north and east by the local road running from Bellafa to Attymon.

This site is the remnant of a much larger bog that is now cutover and reclaimed for agriculture. The site is split by a mineral ridge, with the majority of the remaining high bog found north of the ridge and a small elongated section to the south. The larger section of high bog has areas of hummocks and pools towards the centre and the mid-western area is wet and quaking. The high bog also has a series of mounds present. There is one flush in the centre of the high bog. Cutover is found around most of the site.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Western Raised Bog, consisting of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*E. vaginatum*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*). The bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. capillifolium* are common on the high bog with some *S. magellanicum* and *S. imbricatum* also recorded. Lichen cover (*Cladonia* sp.) is reasonably high throughout the site. The scarce bog moss *S. fuscum* has also been recorded at the centre of the site. In the mid-western section of the high bog Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) has been recorded growing through carpets of bog moss with the liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea*. In the pools complex in the mid-western area of the bog the pools are colonised by the bog mosses *S. cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum*. These inter-connecting pools also contain Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*); hummocks of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* occur as islands between the pools. Tear pools are found throughout the high bog. Some of these pools are algal while others contain the bog mosses *S. cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum*. In the eastern margins of the high bog the moss *Campylopus atrovirens* has been recorded. There are noticeable mounds on the high bog and tall Ling Heather (up to 1 m) has been noted to be growing on the top of four of these. There is one large flush at the centre of the site which flows north. Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) is found on the slopes associated with the flush. The flush itself consists of a series of swallow holes in an area dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). There is a small mineral ridge in the north of the high bog area that is dominated by Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). The cutover to the east of this ridge is dominated by Purple Moor-grass with Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub seen to the north of this area. Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) has been recorded on the cutover south of the high bog.

Greenland White-fronted Goose, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, and Irish Hare, a Red Data Book species, have been recorded on the site.

Current landuses on the site include forestry, peat-cutting and agriculture. The forestry is found on cutover and high bog in the south-west of the site and on cutover in the north of the site. There is mechanised active peat-cutting taking place around most of the site except in the north and west. The largest area of mechanised peat cutting is in the south of the site on an area of high bog. Marginal drains in the east and west of the site are associated with field development. There are also areas of improved grassland associated with the mineral ridge. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include drainage throughout the site and burning of the high bog. There is also evidence of old burning in the western part of the high bog. All of these activities have resulted in the loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Raford River 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. This site supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats, including hummocks and pools. 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.