

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: CLONYDONNIN BOG NHA**

**SITE CODE: 000565**

Clonydonnin Bog NHA is located on the border of Co. Offaly and Co. Westmeath, approximately 13 km south-east of Athlone. It is situated mainly in the townlands of Esker, Laughil and Castletown. The site comprises an area of raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.

The site consists of one dome of high bog, fringed with areas of cutover bog, scrub and low-lying agricultural land. Although the bog surface is relatively dry, the cover of bog mosses is good. However, the typical hummock/hollow topography of a raised bog is poorly-developed. The area of cutover associated with this bog is quite limited, and much of it has been reclaimed for agriculture or overgrown with scrub.

This high bog is an example of a Midlands Raised Bog, with species such as Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and Cottongrass species (*Eriophorum* spp.). Other species found here include Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) and Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*). Bog mosses found on the site include *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. imbricatum*; a number of lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) are also found. The cutover areas of the site are mainly dominated by Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and/or Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) scrub, or by areas of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*). There are also areas of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.).

Current landuse on the site consists of some peat-cutting around the edge of the high bog. In the past this occurred in localised areas at the south-east, west and north-east of the bog. However, peat-cutting has decreased, and is now restricted to two areas at the north-east and south. The older areas of cutover bog have been reclaimed for agriculture (at the north-east and south-west), and scrub or rough grassland have developed on other sections. Damaging activities associated with this landuse include drainage and burning. The site appears to be subject to regular episodes of burning, with most of the surface having been subjected to burning within the past decade. A recent fire has damaged two areas of the bog at the northern side. Recurrent burning at the site is having a drying effect on the bog. These are all activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability. There has also been recent drainage on the high bog, involving the excavation of numerous shallow drains across the surface of the site. However, these are already infilling with vegetation and rewetting is occurring in the centre of the bog.

Clonydonnin 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. 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.

18.11.2002