

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CROCKNAMURRIN MOUNTAIN BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 001878

Crocknamurrin Mountain Bog NHA consists of upland and lowland blanket bog and is located approximately 9 km north-west of Killybegs and 6 km east of Glencolmkille in Co. Donegal. The site is situated in the townlands of Owenteskinny, Croweighter, Crowlar, Crowdoo, Leamagowra and Stravall. The Owenteskinny River forms most of the northern, western and north-western boundaries except where conifer plantations occur on the margins. The southern and eastern sides of the site are defined by a series of roads, fences and other ground features on the margin of the blanket bog habitat. The site includes both northern and southern hill slopes of Crocknamurrin Mountain and covers an altitude range between 100 m and 260 m. Bedrock geology consists of schist and gneiss.

The site consists primarily of upland blanket bog, which overall is largely intact and supports luxuriant vegetation. Damage from factors such as overgrazing and drainage are minimal. The slopes on both sides of the mountain are relatively uniform, possibly due to burning in the past, and are covered by intact blanket bog. Eroded flats with peat gullies, banks and hags are confined to areas near the summit.

The blanket bog vegetation is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) with frequent bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). Hummocks of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are common. A small number of bog pools containing a good diversity of species including bog mosses (*Sphagnum magellanicum* and *S. cuspidatum*) are present in flat areas. Wetter, saddle areas and small flushes are dominated by Deergrass with White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). Draining the slopes, wet channels and narrow flushes, dominated by Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), are common.

At high elevations blanket bog grades into small patches of upland grassland on peaty soil typified by Bent grasses (*Agrostis* spp.), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), mosses (*Polytrichum commune* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) and rushes (*Juncus effusus*, *J. articulatus*, *J. acutiflorus*). Drier areas contain patches of dry heath featuring Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*). On lower slopes, blanket bog grades into wet grassland with frequent Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*). There are also a number of streams and drainage ditches flowing down the mountain slopes.

Merlin, an Irish Red Data Book species, has been recorded on the site.

Current landuse on the site consists of sheep grazing, as well as machine and hand - winning of turf in some areas. Overgrazing by sheep and associated trampling and poaching has damaged the bog surface locally and directly contributed to peat erosion in summit areas. Peat-cutting is frequent around the margins of the bog and extensive areas adjacent to the site have been converted to plantation forestry. The uniformity of vegetation cover may be related to episodic burning possibly associated with peat cutting. More recently, drainage channels associated with turbary and forestry have also damaged the integrity of the site.

Crocknamurrin Mountain Bog NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance containing upland blanket bog supporting a range of blanket bog communities. 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.