

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: HAWKSWOOD BOG NHA

SITE CODE: 002355

Hawkswood bog is located 5 km south of Tullamore, in the townlands of Hawkswood and Derrybeg, Co. Offaly. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog and adjoins Clonard Wood NHA (574) to the west. It can be accessed from the local road to the south of the site.

This raised bog is at the southern extreme of the range of raised bogs in Ireland and is in close proximity to Screggan Bog NHA (921) and Pallis Lough NHA (916). The high bog has pools present and is still wet and quaking in places with very little drainage and no forestry. The wet areas occur in depressions on the high bog, causing re-wetting of the bog surface. Cutover is found all around the high bog margins. There are esker ridges with broadleaved woodland to the south and north of the site.

Much of the high bog has vegetation typical of a Midland Raised Bog, dominated by abundant White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) with Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). There are some wet algal hollows present. Hummocks of the bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. magellanicum* and *S. subnitens* occur and Bog-rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) is also present. The abundance of *Rhynchospora* may be an indication of lowering water levels and recent burning. This is also indicated by the presence of Bog Asphodel hollows and small Ling Heather, which is slower to recover from fire than Cross-leaved Heath and so is not as dominant. Lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) are scarce on the bog due to this burning. Some small scattered hummocks of the bog moss *S. imbricatum* with the liverwort *Odontoschisma sphagni* are regenerating. There are some good pools with *Sphagnum cuspidatum* but these are becoming algal. Dead, burnt hummocks are being colonised by the moss *Campylopus introflexus*. Towards the centre of the high bog there are larger hummocks (2 m in diameter) of the bog moss *S. imbricatum* overgrown with Cross-leaved Heath. An old burn-line is present on the high bog to the east of the site. The eastern high bog has recovered from an older burn with dead hummocks still present. Ling Heather and Cottongrasses dominate with Lichens, abundant Bog Asphodel and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) locally abundant. The lichen (*Cladonia fleurkiana*) is also present, which along with the moss *Campylopus introflexus* is indicative of burning. There are very few living bog moss hummocks. White Beak-sedge is also locally abundant.

To the north of the high bog, there is a very wet area with frequent pools. These are mostly algal, but some are filled with bog moss (*S. cuspidatum*). Between the pools White Beak-sedge, Cross-leaved Heath, Cottongrasses and Ling Heather dominate. This area is very wet and slightly quaking with extensive lawns of the bog moss *S.*

magellanicum. There is also abundant Bog-rosemary present. There is a lot of surface water present.

This area adjoins a wet flush of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) with Cottongrasses and Ling Heather present. There is some Birch (*Betula* spp) and Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) encroaching on the high bog. This area is slightly quaking with White Beak-sedge hollows. There is abundant bog moss *S. cuspidatum* along with the moss *Polytrichum commune*. There are few hummocks here but extensive *Sphagnum* lawns. This flush of Common Reed and Birch is probably occurring on shallow peat. Old peat-cutting to the north is dominated by Bracken and Gorse. A small area of reclaimed grassland occurs between the high bog and the wooded esker ridge to the south. This ridge has mature woodland of Oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). A smaller ridge with woodland (Hawkswood) occurs to the north of the site.

Numerous Snipe have been recorded on the bog.

Current landuses on the site include peat-cutting, agriculture and forestry. There appears to be very little peat-cutting, with only limited domestic peat-cutting to the south and south-west, but otherwise there is little damaging operations. Damaging activities associated with these landuses include burning of the high bog and drainage at the bog margins. These activities have resulted in the loss of habitat, damage to the hydrological status of the site, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Hawkswood 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, lawns and pools. Its southern location adds further interest. 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.