

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ALL SAINTS BOG AND ESKER

SITE CODE: 000566

All Saints' Bog is a lowland raised bog lying about 5 km north-west of Birr and separated from the Little Brosna Callows by a fragmented esker ridge.

The site is unique in that it contains the largest stand of birch woodland in the country growing on an active raised bog. Three distinct vegetation types occur. The true ombrotrophic bog is dominated by *Sphagna* species, e.g. *S. cuspidatum* in pools, *S. magellanicum* forming carpets and *S. imbricatum* forming hummocks. White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) are abundant in the wetter areas and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) occurs on the hummocks. The presence of Brown Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora fusca*), a relatively rare species, and the liverwort *Pleurozia purpurea*, a western species, are notable. Approximately in the centre of the bog is an elongated flushed area with an outer non-wooded area surrounding a central wooded area. The non-wooded area is dominated by *Sphagnum recurvum* and *S. fimbriatum*, with hummocks of *S. palustre* and *S. capillifolium*. Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) is common and Heather, Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) are abundant. The wooded area, which covers c. 20 ha, is dominated by birch (mostly *Betula pubescens* but with a little *B. pendula*), 5 - 8m high. There are scattered pines and a shrub layer of willows (*Salix aurita* and *S. atrocinnerea*), a dwarf shrub layer of Heather and Crowberry and a thick mat of mosses and lichens: *Sphagnum fimbriatum*, *S. palustre*, *Aulacomnium palustre*, *Polytrichum commune*, *Peltigera* cf. *canina* and *Cladonia portentosa*. In drier and more open areas Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is locally dominant with grasses, e.g. *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and the Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*). In wetter areas Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) occurs. The rare Myxomycete fungus, *Badhamia lilacina* has been recorded from the site.

The birch wood supports an interesting invertebrate fauna, with two rare species being recorded; a fly (*Dicthenida bimaculata*) and a ladybird (*Hippodamia tredecimpunctata*). There is a concentration of saproxylic invertebrates in the birch woodland, which suggests that the woodland is ancient. The bog has traditionally been used as an occasional refuge for part of the Little Brosna flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese, an Annex I species of the EU Birds' Directive, although in recent years they have not been observed on the bog.

An extensive area in the NE corner of the bog, representing about 20% of the bog surface, is being cut by machine, with drains running into the eastern edge of the birch woodland. This appears to be leading to the bog drying out as the surface is reported to be much drier than when first surveyed in the mid-1980s. The absence of the geese may also be indicative of drying out.

To the south of the bog are the fragmented remains of an esker ridge, which may have an influence on the hydrology of the flush. It is included in the site partly for this reason, but also for its own intrinsic value. The area south-east of Coneycarn pit is steeply sloping and unfertilised, and supports species-rich calcareous esker grassland. A large population of Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*), a species listed in the Irish Red Data Book of vascular plants, occurs here. Coneycarn pit itself supports populations of one legally protected and one threatened plant species: Red Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*) and Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*), both annual species of ruderal habitats, listed in the Irish Red Data Book of vascular plants.

All Saints' Bog is a unique bog, important for its vegetation types, plants, invertebrates and birds. To conserve the site peat cutting needs to stop, drains blocked and marginal dams built to raise the water table. The esker supports species-rich grassland, including rare species. They should continue to be grazed but left unfertilized. Further gravel extraction should be prevented, although some disturbance may be required to conserve the red hemp-nettle and blue fleabane.