

SLIEVEANORRA & CROAGHAN

A SPECIAL PLACE...



A view of Slieveanorra and Croaghan

SITES OF BIOLOGICAL AND EARTH SCIENCE IMPORTANCE HAVE BEEN SURVEYED BY NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY TO ASSESS THEIR SCIENTIFIC INTEREST. THE BEST SITES ARE NOW BEING DECLARED AS AREAS OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (ASSIs). IN DOING SO WE AIM TO SAFEGUARD THESE IMPORTANT SITES FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Northern Ireland is particularly well suited to the formation of peat because the climate is cool and wet. Blanket bog generally occurs in the uplands, above 150 metres. It is estimated that there is over 142,000 hectares of blanket bog in Northern Ireland. Most of this has been cut and reclaimed, afforested or drained, with only 15% remaining undamaged today.



Sphagnum moss

by mosses and liverworts, principally *Sphagnum* bog mosses. It is these actively growing *Sphagnum* bog mosses that eventually lead to peat development over a long period of time.



Bogbean

One particular feature of interest is the extensive and well-developed pool complex. Some of the pools are large and support aquatic *Sphagnum* mosses and Bogbean. Round-leaved Sundew and Great Sundew occur around the edge of the pools.

The bog provides important habitat for upland birds particularly Merlin and Hen Harrier. Both of these species currently breed in adjoining areas but use the open peatland for foraging. Other species found on the bog include Snipe, Red Grouse, Raven and Common Lizard.

Upland blanket bogs have taken around 5,000 years to develop

and support unique vegetation communities that are irreplaceable. These bog systems are very easily damaged by human activity. Burning and overgrazing destroys the vegetation and structure of the bog surface, and drainage removes water from the body of the peat. This leads to a lower water table and causes the surface of the bog

to dry out. Peat cutting is one of the most damaging activities as it not only removes the vegetation from the bog surface, but also the peat itself. In some



Hen Harrier

instances, cutover blanket bog has been reclaimed for agriculture and there is now little evidence that it ever existed. It is therefore vitally important that the best remaining areas of blanket bog are maintained and encouraged to regenerate. Northern Ireland Environment Agency is keen to work closely with landowners to maintain and enhance Slieveanorra and Croaghan ASSI.