

Scientific name	<i>Ulex gallii</i> – <i>Erica cinerea</i> heath
Common name	Western Gorse – Bell Heather heath
Community code	HE2A

Vegetation

Spiny, dark green patches of *Ulex gallii* dominate this heathland community, accompanied by bushes of *Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica cinerea*. Amongst these are usually found trailing stems of *Potentilla erecta* and often a few tufts of *Molinia caerulea*. *Carex binervis* and *Carex panicea* are frequent. The bryophyte layer mainly consists of *Hypnum jutlandicum*. Other species are only occasional, with grasses such as *Agrostis canina/vinealis*, *Agrostis capillaris*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and *Danthonia decumbens* coming through where grazing has broken up the dwarf shrub layer.

Ecology

This heath community occurs predominantly on the lower slopes of hills and mountains and along coastal cliff-tops (mean altitude = 144 m, $n = 48$; mean slope = 15.1° , $n = 23$). Soils are acidic, relatively well-draining and of low fertility (mean extent of bare rock = 3.5%, $n = 25$).

Sub-communities

Two, rather loose, sub-communities are described. The *Daboecia cantabrica* – *Hypochaeris radicata* sub-community (HE2Ai) is predominantly a regional variety from mid-west Ireland from peat-free soils, occasionally with some basic influence. The *Calluna vulgaris* – *Hypnum jutlandicum* sub-community (HE2Aii) is the more widespread, typical assemblage.

Similar communities

This is a distinctive assemblage, since in no other community is *Ulex gallii* as frequent as it is here.

Records and distribution

Number of records (all)

Clearly assigned:	95
Transitional:	14
Total:	109

Number of records (mapped)

2001-2020:	27
1986-2000:	58
1971-1985:	6
Pre-1971:	17
Total:	108

Number of hectads (by most recent time period)

2001-2020:	15
1986-2000:	12
1971-1985:	2
Pre-1971:	8
Total:	37

Number of hectads (records in each time period)

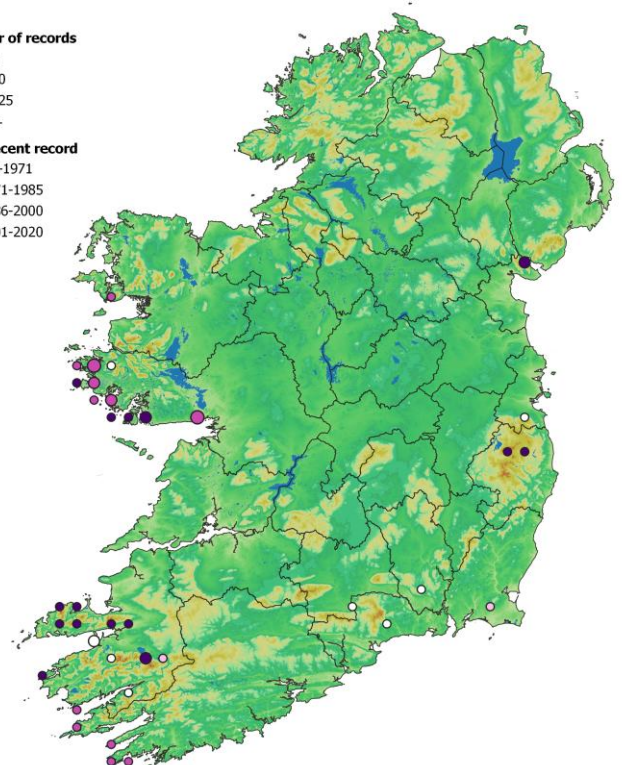
2001-2020:	15
1986-2000:	14
1971-1985:	4
Pre-1971:	9

Number of records

- 1-3
- 4-10
- 11-25
- 26+

Most recent record

- pre-1971
- 1971-1985
- 1986-2000
- 2001-2020



Synoptic table (n = 79)

Species	Frequency (from I-V)	Cover min (med) max	Species	Frequency (from I-V)	Cover min (med) max
<i>Ulex gallii</i>	V	3-(8)-9	<i>Rhytidadelphus squarrosus</i>	II	+-(2)-7
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	V	2-(5)-9	<i>Cladonia portentosa</i>	I	+-(2)-7
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	V	+-(3)-7	<i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i>	I	1-(2)-3
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	V	1-(5)-8	<i>Viola riviniana/reichenbachiana</i>	I	+-(2)-5
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	IV	2-(3)-8	<i>Carex pilulifera</i>	I	+-(2)-3
<i>Carex binervis</i>	III	+-(3)-5	<i>Frullania tamarisci</i>	I	+-(2)-5
<i>Carex panicea</i>	III	1-(2)-7	<i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i>	I	+-(3)-3
<i>Hypnum jutlandicum</i>	III	+-(3)-8	<i>Carex flacca</i>	I	2-(3)-3
<i>Agrostis canina/vinealis</i>	II	1-(3)-5	<i>Galium saxatile</i>	I	+-(2)-4
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	II	2-(3)-5	<i>Nardus stricta</i>	I	1-(3)-5
<i>Scleropodium purum</i>	II	+-(3)-5	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	I	1-(2)-3
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	II	1-(3)-5	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	I	2-(3)-5
<i>Daboecia cantabrica</i>	II	1-(5)-7	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>	I	+-(2)-3
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	II	1-(3)-5	<i>Hypnum cupressiforme</i>	I	2-(3)-4
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	II	1-(2)-5	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	I	2-(2)-4
<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	II	+-(2)-3	<i>Trichophorum cesp./germanicum</i>	I	1-(2)-3
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	II	1-(3)-5	<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	I	+-(3)-8
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	II	1-(2)-4	<i>Thymus polytrichus</i>	I	1-(3)-5
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	II	+-(2)-3	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	I	1-(2)-4
<i>Danthonia decumbens</i>	II	1-(3)-7	<i>Festuca vivipara</i>	I	1-(3)-4

Affinities

GHI: HH1 Dry siliceous heath / HH3 Wet heath

ZM: CH01B Ulicion Malcuit 1929

EUNIS: F4.231 Maritime gorse heaths / F4.232 Hiberno-Britannic *Calluna vulgaris-Ulex gallii* heaths

NVC: H4a *Ulex gallii-Agrostis curtisii* heath *Agrostis curtisii-Erica cinerea* sub-community (64.1%)

Annex I: 4010 Wet heath / 4030 Dry heath

Proxy environmental data

Light: 7.0 Reaction: 2.9 Wetness: 6.0 Fertility: 2.1 Salinity: 0.0

Conservation value

Most examples of this vegetation qualify as EU HD Annex I habitat 4030 Dry heaths. Where *Molinia caerulea* is abundant, habitat 4010 Wet heaths should be considered. This is on average a rather species-poor heath community (species/4 m² = 15.4, n = 66).

Management

These heaths may be used as rough grazing land (typically for sheep), in which case burning may be periodically used across large areas to suppress the dwarf shrubs and encourage grass growth. Overgrazing can also be a problem, resulting in the decline of *Erica* and *Calluna*. Another threat is agricultural improvement. Stretches of heath along coastal cliffs are often unsuitable for grazing and are essentially unmanaged.

Key references

Perrin, P.M., Barron, S.J., Roche, J.R., O'Hanrahan, B. (2014) Guidelines for a national survey and conservation assessment of upland vegetation and habitats in Ireland. *Irish Wildlife Manuals* No. 79. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin. [and associated series of site reports from the National Survey of Upland Habitats]

Conaghan, J. (2000) An assessment of the conservation value of blanket bog landscape to the west of Galway city. (unpublished). The Heritage Council, Kilkenny

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Synopsis author(s): P.M. Perrin



Photo 1. HE2A *Ulex gallii* – *Erica cinerea* heath, Cloghfune, Torc Mountain, Killarney National Park, Kerry
(J. Denyer/E. Joyce, July 2011)



Photo 2. HE2A *Ulex gallii* – *Erica cinerea* heath, Gowlaneard, An Cnapán Mór, Kerry (R. Hodd, August 2011)