



<b>Scientific name</b>	<i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Nardus stricta</i> heath
<b>Common name</b>	Purple Moor-grass – Mat-grass heath
<b>Community code</b>	HE4B

### Vegetation

This is a rather variable community in which the main field layer species are *Molinia caerulea*, *Nardus stricta* and *Carex panicea*. Dwarf shrub cover is provided by *Erica tetralix* and *Calluna vulgaris* but is typically low. Other constant vascular plants are *Narthecium ossifragum* and *Trichophorum cespitosum/germanicum*. In addition to *Carex panicea*, there are several frequent species which are indicators of disturbance or flushing: *Juncus squarrosus*, *Juncus bulbosus*, *Eleocharis multicaulis* and *Carex viridula*. In the bryophyte layer, the main species are *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, *Hypnum jutlandicum* and *Campylopus atrovirens*, but *Sphagnum compactum*, an indicator of disturbance, is also frequent.

### Ecology

This vegetation occurs mainly on the middle slopes of hills and mountains, on peaty, acidic, infertile soils. It may develop from other wet heath types due to grazing pressure. There is also a distinct element of flushing.

### Sub-communities

Two sub-communities have been described. The *Eriophorum angustifolium* – *Carex echinata* sub-community (HE4Bi) represents the more flushed examples of this assemblage. *Eriophorum angustifolium*, *Carex echinata*, *Juncus bulbosus*, *Eleocharis multicaulis* and *Drosera rotundifolia* are all much more frequent there than in the grassier *Nardus stricta* – *Agrostis canina/vinealis* sub-community (HE4Bii) in which *Juncus squarrosus* is often found.

### Similar communities

From other HE4 *Molinia* heath communities, HE4B is differentiated by the high cover of *Carex panicea* and the presence of other flush-preferring species. It is noteworthy that 'brown mosses' associated with alkaline flushes and fens are not typically found in this community. From the grassland communities of the GL4 *Nardus stricta* – *Galium saxatile* group, HE4B differs in the abundance of heath species including *Molinia caerulea*, *Narthecium ossifragum* and *Erica tetralix*.

### Records and distribution

#### Number of records (all)

Clearly assigned:	161
Transitional:	29
Total:	190

#### Number of records (mapped)

2001-2015:	24
1986-2000:	137
1971-1985:	0
Pre-1971:	2
Total:	163

#### Number of hectads (most recent records)

2001-2015:	10
1986-2000:	7
1971-1985:	0
Pre-1971:	2
Total:	19

#### Number of hectads (all mapped records)

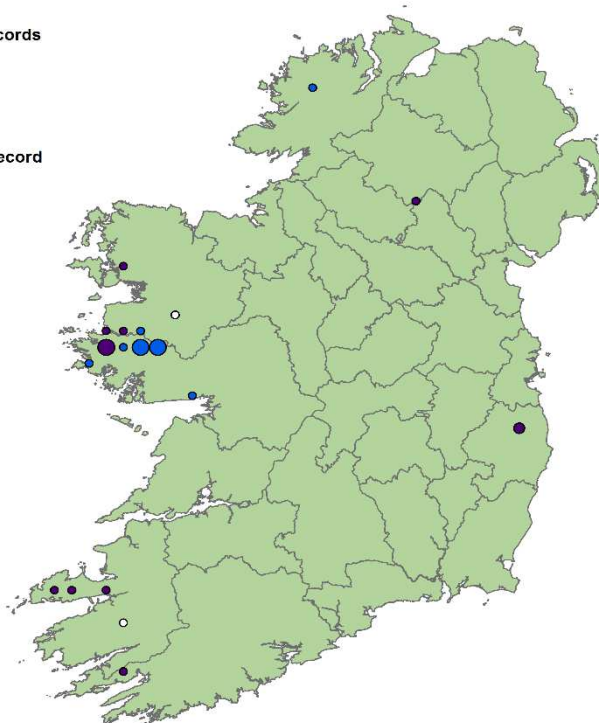
2001-2015:	10
1986-2000:	10
1971-1985:	0
Pre-1971:	2

#### Number of records

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

#### Most recent record

- 2001-2015
- 1986-2000
- 1971-1985
- pre-1971



**Synoptic table (n = 155)**

Species	Frequency	Cover	Species	Frequency	Cover
	(from I-V)	min (med) max		(from I-V)	min (med) max
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	V	2-(5)-9	<i>Carex echinata</i>	II	2-(3)-5
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	V	1-(3)-5	<i>Breutelia chrysocoma</i>	II	+- (2)-5
<i>Carex panicea</i>	V	+- (5)-7	<i>Erica cinerea</i>	II	+- (3)-5
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	V	1-(3)-7	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	II	1-(3)-7
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	V	2-(3)-5	<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	II	+- (2)-3
<i>Nardus stricta</i>	V	1-(5)-9	<i>Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus</i>	II	+- (2)-5
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	IV	+- (3)-5	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	II	+- (2)-3
<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i>	IV	+- (3)-7	<i>Sphagnum subsecundum</i> agg.	II	1-(3)-8
<i>Trichophorum cesp./germanicum</i>	IV	2-(3)-7	<i>Sphagnum palustre</i>	II	+- (2)-5
<i>Hypnum jutlandicum</i>	IV	+- (2)-8	<i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i>	II	1-(2)-5
<i>Campylopus atrovirens</i>	IV	+- (3)-5	<i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i>	II	+- (2)-3
<i>Juncus squarrosus</i>	III	1-(3)-8	<i>Polytrichum commune</i>	II	+- (2)-5
<i>Eleocharis multicaulis</i>	III	2-(5)-7	<i>Schoenus nigricans</i>	II	2-(3)-7
<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>	III	1-(3)-5	<i>Pleurozia purpurea</i>	II	+- (2)-5
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	III	+- (2)-4	<i>Cladonia uncialis</i>	II	2-(2)-3
<i>Danthonia decumbens</i>	III	+- (3)-7	<i>Rhynchospora alba</i>	II	1-(3)-7
<i>Carex viridula</i>	III	1-(3)-5	<i>Cladonia portentosa</i>	II	+- (2)-3
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>	III	2-(3)-5	<i>Rhytidiadelphus loreus</i>	I	+- (2)-5
<i>Sphagnum compactum</i>	III	1-(3)-7	<i>Sphagnum papillosum</i>	I	+- (2)-7
<i>Agrostis canina/vinealis</i>	II	1-(3)-7	<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	I	+- (2)-3

**Affinities**

GHI: HH3 Wet heath / PB2 Upland blanket bog  
 ZM: OXY-O1A Ericion tetralicis Schwickerath 1933  
 EUNIS: F4.11 Northern wet heaths  
 NVC: M15 *Scirpus cespitosus* – *Erica tetralix* wet heath (66.0%)  
 Annex I: 4010 Wet heath / 7130 Blanket bog (active)\*

**Proxy environmental data**

Light: 7.3      Reaction: 3.0      Wetness: 7.5      Fertility: 1.8      Salinity: 0.0

**Conservation value**

This is on average a moderately species-rich community (species/4 m<sup>2</sup> = 22.4, n = 131). Most instances can be referred to the EU HD Annex I habitat 4010 Wet heath but there are also some cases from habitat 7130 Blanket bog (active)\*.

**Management**

This community, which often forms parts of commonages, is usually used as rough grazing land (typically for sheep) and there are signs of overgrazing. Burning may be periodically used across large areas to suppress the dwarf shrubs and encourage grass growth. Another threat is agricultural improvement.

**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, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

**Synopsis version:** V1.0

**Synopsis date:** November 2017

**Synopsis author(s):** P.M. Perrin



Photo 1. HE4B *Molinia caerulea* – *Nardus stricta* heath, Glenummera, Sheeffry Hills, Mayo  
(J. Conaghan, October 2010)



Photo 2. HE4B *Molinia caerulea* – *Nardus stricta* heath, Kilcaskan, Caha Mountains, Cork (J. Roche, August 2014)