# Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC)

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## Community Synopsis

| | |
|---|---|
| **Scientific name** | *Festuca vivipara – Oligotrichum hercynicum* fellfield |
| **Common name** | Viviparous Fescue – Hercynian Haircap fellfield |
| **Community code** | RH2F |

**Vegetation**

Growth of plants in this montane vegetation type is invariably very short, with cover ranging from very sparse to moderate. Constant vascular plants are *Agrostis capillaris*, *Festuca vivipara* and *Galium saxatile*, while *Deschampsia flexuosa* is frequent. These species are typically accompanied by some small patches of the hoary *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and scraps of *Diplophyllum albicans* are to be found between the stones. A fair number of diminutive acrocarps may be found here, the chief ones being *Dicranella heteromalla*, *Polytrichum alpinum* and *Oligotrichum hercynicum*. Arctic-alpines are not uncommon; frequently one will spot the round, green leaves of *Salix herbacea* and sometimes *Carex bigelowii*. Occasional finds of *Thymus polytrichus* or *Armeria maritima* may be made.

**Ecology**

This community is limited to exposed plateaux and upper slopes of the high mountains (mean altitude = 658 m, $n = 29$; mean slope = 8.3°, $n = 29$; mean extent of bare rock = 42.9%, $n = 29$; mean soil depth = 3.0 cm, $n = 29$) and includes vegetation from scree, stony grasslands and gravelly flats; these latter have potential links with the fellfields of Scotland, Scandinavia, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands. See account in Rodwell (2000).

**Sub-communities**

No sub-communities are described.

**Similar communities**

This community is closely related to the HE3E *Racomitrium lanuginosum – Festuca vivipara* heath and the scree communities RH2B and RH2C, but differs in the lower cover of *Racomitrium* species and the typical absence of dwarf shrubs and pleurocarpous mosses. The GL4B *Nardus stricta – Potentilla erecta* grassland has a higher cover of *Nardus* and pleurocarps and lower frequency of *Festuca vivipara*. It also occurs at lower altitudes.

**Records and distribution**

*Number of records (all)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Clearly assigned: | 33 |
| Transitional: | 8 |
| Total: | 41 |

*Number of records (mapped)*

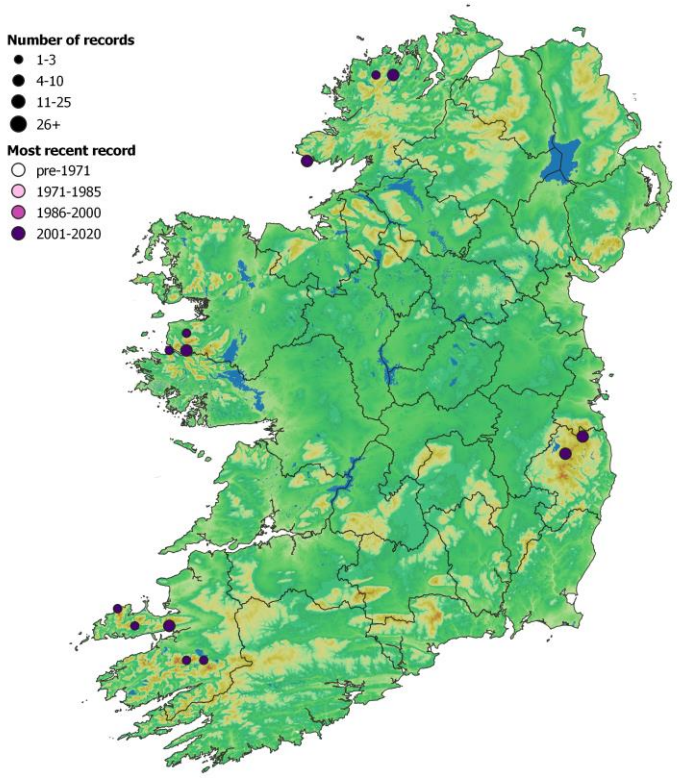
| | |
|---|---|
| 2001-2020: | 40 |
| 1986-2000: | 1 |
| 1971-1985: | 0 |
| Pre-1971: | 0 |
| Total: | 41 |

*Number of hectads (by most recent time period)*

| | |
|---|---|
| 2001-2020: | 13 |
| 1986-2000: | 0 |
| 1971-1985 | 0 |
| Pre-1971: | 0 |
| Total: | 13 |

*Number of hectads (records in each time period)*

| | |
|---|---|
| 2001-2020: | 13 |
| 1986-2000: | 1 |
| 1971-1985 | 0 |
| Pre-1971: | 0 |



| Synoptic table (*n* = 29) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Species** | **Frequency (from I-V)** | **Cover min (med) max** | **Species** | **Frequency (from I-V)** | **Cover min (med) max** |
| *Agrostis capillaris* | V | 1-(4)-5 | *Thymus polytrichus* | II | +-(3)-5 |
| *Racomitrium lanuginosum* | V | +-(3)-5 | *Agrostis canina/vinealis* | II | 4-(5)-7 |
| *Festuca vivipara* | V | 1-(3)-7 | *Campylopus atrovirens* | II | +-(1)-2 |
| *Diplophyllum albicans* | IV | +-(2)-3 | *Carex viridula* | II | 2-(3)-7 |
| *Galium saxatile* | IV | +-(3)-5 | *Nardus stricta* | II | 3-(3)-5 |
| *Nardia scalaris* | III | +-(2)-4 | *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* | II | +-(1)-2 |
| *Deschampsia flexuosa* | III | 2-(2)-5 | *Armeria maritima* | I | 2-(3)-5 |
| *Dicranella heteromalla* | III | 2-(2)-2 | *Anthoxanthum odoratum* | I | +-(1)-2 |
| *Salix herbacea* | III | 2-(3)-7 | *Hylocomium splendens* | I | +-(+)-2 |
| *Calluna vulgaris* | II | +-(2)-3 | *Juncus bulbosus* | I | 2-(3)-3 |
| *Carex pilulifera* | II | 1-(2)-4 | *Juncus squarrosus* | I | 1-(2)-3 |
| *Vaccinium myrtillus* | II | 1-(2)-3 | *Lophozia ventricosa* | I | +-(2)-2 |
| *Carex bigelowii* | II | 2-(4)-7 | *Pogonatum urnigerum* | I | +-(2)-4 |
| *Oligotrichum hercynicum* | II | +-(1)-2 | *Polytrichum formosum* | I | 1-(2)-3 |
| *Polytrichum alpinum* | II | +-(2)-4 | *Polytrichum piliferum* | I | +-(1)-3 |
| *Solidago virgaurea* | II | 1-(2)-2 | *Racomitrium heterostichum* | I | +-(2)-3 |
| *Campylopus flexuosus* | II | +-(+)-3 | *Andreaea rupestris* | I | +-(+)-1 |
| *Cladonia subcervicornis* | II | +-(2)-2 | *Cephalozia bicuspidata* | I | +-(2)-2 |
| *Hypnum jutlandicum* | II | +-(1)-3 | *Huperzia selago* | I | 2-(2)-2 |
| *Potentilla erecta* | II | +-(2)-3 | *Saxifraga spathularis* | I | 1-(2)-2 |

**Affinities**

GHI: ER3 Siliceous scree and loose rock / HH4 Montane heath

ZM: CT01B Nardo-Caricion rigidae Nordhagen 1943

EUNIS: H2.1 Cold siliceous screes / H5.11 Fjell fields with very sparse or no vegetation

NVC: U10a *Carex bigelowii-Racomitrium lanuginosum* moss heath *Galium saxatile* sub-community (54.1%)

Annex I: 6150 Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands / 8110 Siliceous scree

**Proxy environmental data**

Light: 7.0 Reaction: 3.3 Wetness: 5.5 Fertility: 2.4 Salinity: 0.1

**Conservation value**

Examples of this community from scree slopes correspond with the EU HD Annex I habitat 8110 Siliceous scree. Other examples, particularly those which support arctic-alpine species, are likely to correspond with habitat 6150 Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands. Species/4 $m^2$ = 13.9, *n* = 29.

**Management**

This vegetation, which often form parts of commonages, may be used as rough grazing land (typically for sheep) and overgrazing may be a problem. Climate change threatens arctic-alpine species which are restricted to montane communities such as this.

**Key references**

Rodwell, J.S., Dring, J.C., Averis, A.B.G., Proctor, M.C.F., Malloch, A.J.C., Schaminée, J.H.J., Dargie, T.C.D. (2000) Review of coverage of the National Vegetation Classification, JNCC Report 302. JNCC, Peterborough.

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.

Hodd, R. (2012) A study of the oceanic montane vegetation and bryophyte communities of Western Ireland and their potential response to climate change. (Ph.D. thesis). National University of Ireland Galway.

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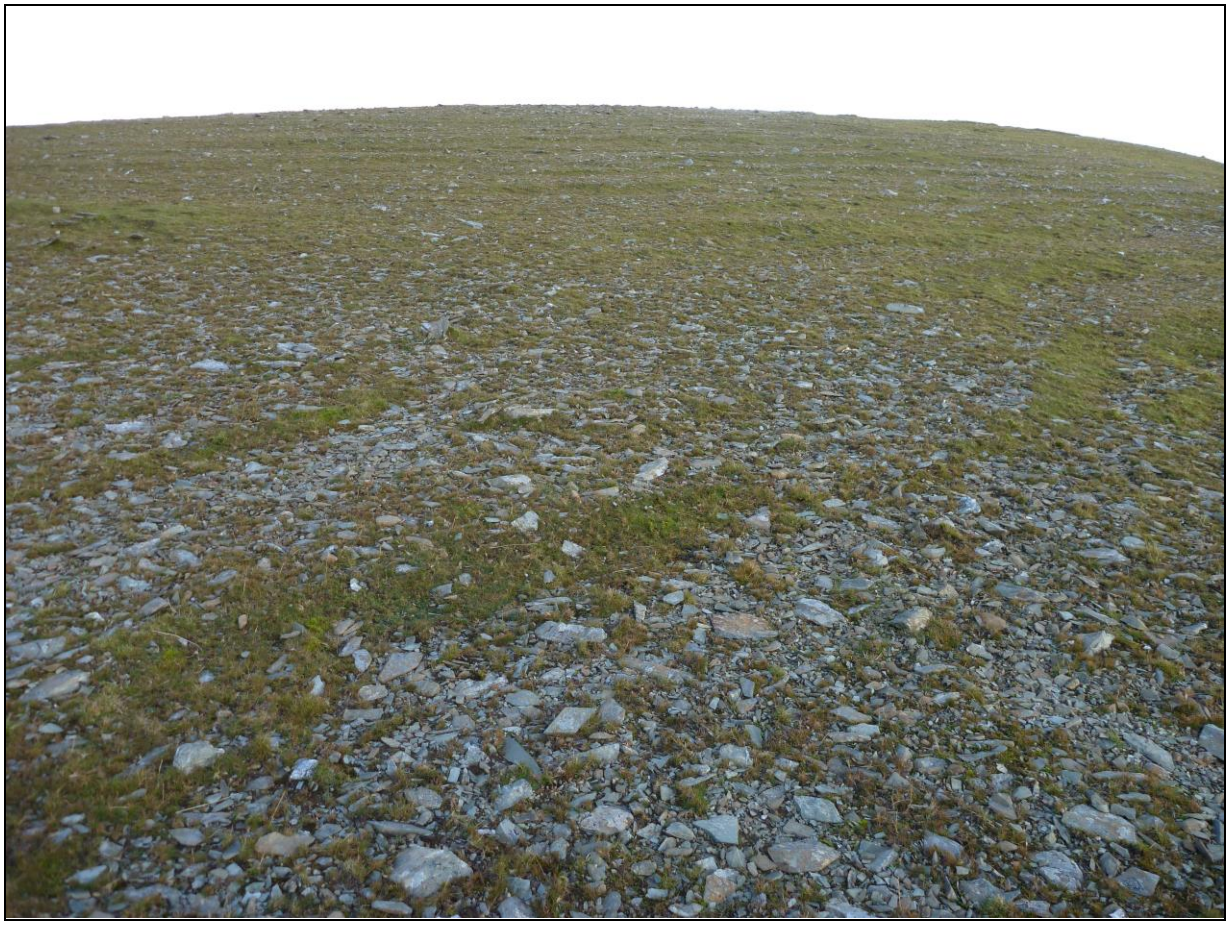

Photo 1. RH2F *Festuca vivipara – Oligotrichum hercynicum* fellfield, Barrclashcame, Sheeffy Hills, Mayo
(J. Denyer/P. Perrin, September 2010)

Photo 2. RH2F *Festuca vivipara – Oligotrichum hercynicum* fellfield, Barrclashcame, Sheeffry Hills, Mayo
(J. Denyer/P. Perrin, September 2010)