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Binevenagh ASSI

Condition Assessment Report
Invertebrate Assemblage 2024

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Binevenagh ASSI Condition Assessment Report Terrestrial Invertebrates 2024

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Acknowledgements

The continued stewardship of the special lands within the ASSI, and access permission to undertake monitoring, is acknowledged. Many protected areas in Northern Ireland are owned and managed by private landowners and farmers and are not accessible to the public.

Summary

Using JNCC Common Standards Monitoring methodology, the Terrestrial Invertebrate features of Binevenagh ASSI are currently defined as follows:

1. Grassland (inland) assemblage - **Unfavourable**
2. Open Rock (lowland) assemblage - **Not Assessed**
3. Wet seepage assemblage - **Favourable**

The grassland (inland) assemblage was assessed as unfavourable as none of the target invertebrate species were detected during the survey. In addition, much of the grassland is overgrazed, resulting in a short sward with few flowering plants and low insect abundance. Grazing pressure below the cliff faces should be reduced to facilitate a greater abundance of flowering plants, which in turn would be expected to increase insect abundance.

The open rock (lowland) assemblage was not assessed as the target species identified in 2007 were not considered suitable as assemblage species for this habitat. As no additional suitable target species were recorded in 2024 it is recommended that this feature should be excluded from future monitoring.

The wet seepage assemblage was assessed as favourable, as one target species was recorded and additional target species were identified. The habitat quality is generally good, with high botanical diversity and insect abundance. The daggerfly *Empis verralli* recorded here was the first Northern Ireland record for this species.

During the approach to the survey area two additional species were recorded for the first time in Ireland the dipteran *Rhamphomyia curvula* (family Empididae) and *Andrena ruficrus* (Andrenidae).

Overall, Binevenagh ASSI retains much of its diversity and naturalness, and remains a special place.

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1. Condition Statement

The interest features of Binevenagh ASSI and their condition status are summarised in Table 1 below.

It is important to note that under the Common Standards Monitoring methodology, a site is classified as unfavourable if any primary attribute is failing. In many cases, these sites continue to represent excellent examples of Northern Ireland's best natural assets.

This report deals solely with the features shaded in blue on Table 1. The site contains other deatures of interest including Bryophyte assemblage – Basic montane cliffs and Scree, Fungi assemblage, Higher plant assemblage, Calcareous grassland, Inland rock – calcareous & calcshist screes, and Tertiary igneous.

Table 1: Binevenagh ASSI Interest Features summary results

ASSI Features	Reporting responsibility	Condition Assessment			
		2020-2025	2014-2019	2008-2013	2002-2007
Grassland (inland) invertebrate assemblage	Species – Invertebrate	Unfavourable 0 favourable attributes 2 unfavourable attributes	Not assessed	Not assessed	Favourable
Open Rock/Scree (lowland) invertebrate assemblage	Species - Invertebrate	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed	Favourable
Wet seepage invertebrate assemblage	Species - Invertebrate	Favourable 2 favourable attributes 0 unfavourable attributes	Not assessed	Not assessed	Favourable

*More detailed information on attribute breakdown is available in Section 7 and Appendix 1 of this report.

Background

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (hereafter referred to as the Department) in its role as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body, undertakes regular monitoring of the special assets, or features, contained within specially protected sites across Northern Ireland. These sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs). Further details can be found at https://www.daerani.gov.uk/services/searching-protected-areas.

This monitoring enables reporting on the status of the special features which are protected, enables objective feedback on current management measures and can inform any subsequent management intentions. Results can also contribute to the assessment of relevant policies in place and also inform future policy development. In addition, the results inform the implementation of a range of obligations under both national and international policy and legislation. These include: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the NorthEast Atlantic (OSPAR), the Bern Convention, the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland 1995 (as amended), the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), and the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

The monitoring undertaken is called Condition Assessment, as it is the condition of the special features that is being assessed. The approach is also known as Common Standards Monitoring, because the methodology aims to result in a *common standard* being reported across sites in NI and

the rest of the UK. The Department aims to complete a rolling programme of ASSI Condition Assessment and reporting every six years.
The monitoring is focused, as outlined in the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) guidance (JNCC, 2004a), primarily on the interest features for which the site has been notified or designated. They include habitat types, species and earth science features, as well as complex features such as habitat mosaics and species assemblages. Each interest feature must be identified, monitored, assessed and reported upon separately.

Monitoring and assessment of the condition of the interest features of individual sites enables relevant authorities, agencies and landowners to adapt management measures accordingly to ensure conservation objectives are achieved.

The Conservation Objectives for each site contain details of the attributes (measurable targets) for each interest feature within the site: the condition assessment determines the condition status of each interest feature when compared against relevant feature attributes. The JNCC Statement on Common Standards Monitoring (JNCC, 2019) assesses interest features using one of the following four condition categories. These are all common standards:

- **Favourable**: Condition objectives are being met

- **Unfavourable**: Condition objectives are not being met

- **Partially destroyed**: The feature, habitat or processes essential to support it have been removed or irretrievably altered. A condition assessment should be carried out on the remaining, intact feature.

- **Destroyed**: The interest feature, its supporting habitat or processes, have been affected (completely or partially) to such an extent that there is no hope of recovery.

The JNCC has listed the following trend qualifiers which were previously considered part of the common standards as optional, which the Department may choose to use as required:

- **Favourable – maintained**: The conservation objectives which were met at the previous assessment are still being met.

- **Favourable – recovered**: The interest feature has gained favourable condition, having been previously recorded as unfavourable.

- **Favourable – declining**: All targets are being met, but identified pressures indicate that unfavourable condition will result if these pressures are left unaddressed.

- **Unfavourable – recovering:** The interest feature has begun to show, or is continuing to show, a trend towards favourable condition.

- **Unfavourable - no change**. The interest feature is unfavourable but neither declining nor recovering.

- **Unfavourable - declining**. The interest feature is declining as a consequence of damaging activity, but where recovery is possible, either spontaneously or if suitable management input is made.

2. ASSI Overview

Binevenagh is a prominent basalt outcrop and cliff formation located approximately 5km north of Limavady in Co. Derry. The area is of special scientific interest because of its geological and geomorphological features, its cliff vegetation, grasslands (in particular herb-rich calcicolous grassland), bryophyte-rich scree, rare plants, bryophytes and fungi (NIEA, 2015). It is particularly notable for its assemblage of boreo-alpine plant species and waxcap (*Hygrocybe*) species.

Many protected areas in Northern Ireland are owned and managed by private landowners and farmers and are not accessible to the public.

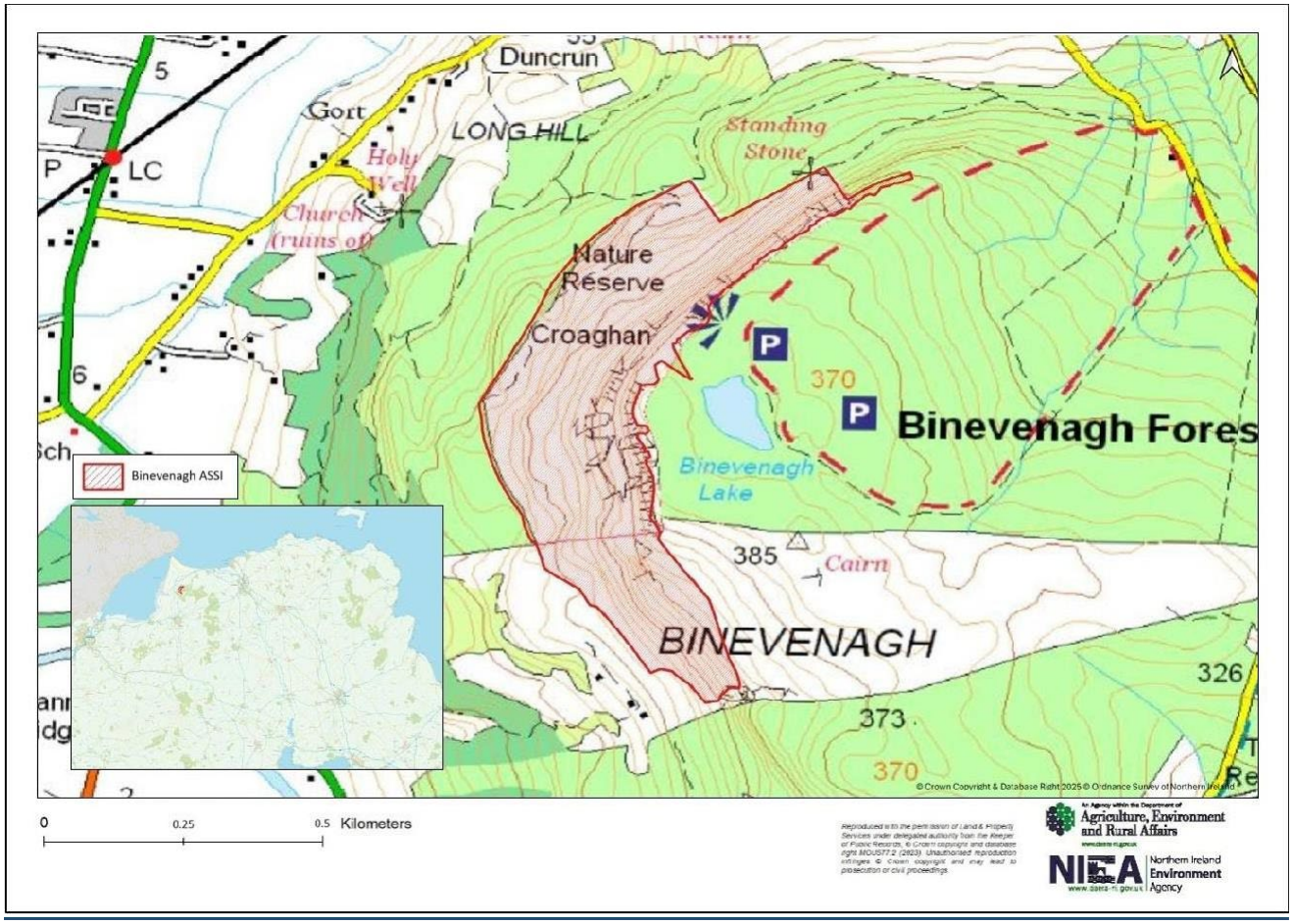
Table 2: ASSI details

ASSI name	Binevenagh
ASSI code	ASSI 212
Council Area (s)	Derry City and Strabane District Council
Irish Grid Reference	C 686 309
Landowner details	Public and Private
ASSI size	90.79 ha
Date declared	24/07/2000

Further information on Binevenagh ASSI is available via:

- DAERA website;
- NIEA map viewer;
- NBN (National Biodiversity Network) Atlas NI

3. Location map



Map 1 Binevenagh ASSI boundary and NI location

4. Feature description

This report outlines the invertebrate assemblages found in three major habitat features within the ASSI. These are open rock (lowland), species-rich grassland and lough outflow/seepage as defined in the previous 2007 CSM report.

Open rock (lowland) assemblage

This assemblage was identified in 2007 with 3 target species listed:

- *Microplana terrestris* (Planaria)
- *Columella aspera* (Mollusca)
- *Lithobius borealis* (Chilopoda)

These target species are no longer considered suitable as assemblage species for this habitat. *Columella aspera* is a widespread species not particularly associated with the habitat. Planaria and Chilopoda are specialised groups which are seldom recorded but the species listed are likely to be widespread in various habitats. Neither was looked for in the 2007 or 2024 projects.

Grassland (inland) assemblage

This assemblage relates to the species-rich grassland on the slopes of Binevenagh. Two target species were initially identified for this assemblage:

- *Harpalus latus* (Coleoptera: Carabidae)
- *Olisthopus rotundatus* (Coleoptera: Carabidae)

A further two target species were found during fieldwork in 2007 and added as future targets for this assemblage:

- *Amischa bifoveolata* (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae),
- *Perapion violaceum* (Coleoptera: Apionidae).

Fieldwork in 2024 resulted in the identification of new target species for this feature (see Section 8).

Wet seepages assemblage

This assemblage primarily relates to the outflow from Binevenagh Lake. Two target species were initially identified for this assemblage:

- *Hydroporus longulus* (Coleoptera: Hydrophilidae)
- *Phagocata vitta* (Planaria)

As Planaria were not covered by the 2007 or 2024 projects *Phagocata vitta* was not searched for in 2024.

A further two target species were found during fieldwork in 2007 and added as targets for this assemblage:

- *Stenichnus collaris* (Coleoptera: Scydmaenidae), • *Gerris costae* (Heteroptera).

Fieldwork in 2024 resulted in the identification of new target species for this feature (see Section 8).

5. Common Standards Monitoring Methodology

The condition of the terrestrial habitat feature of Binevenagh ASSI has been assessed following the Common Standards Monitoring (CSM) guidance Common Standards Monitoring guidance | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation for invertebrates.

The attributes to be measured are dependent on the specific interest features and are derived from a combination of direct and indirect attributes from the tables in the CSM guidance.

Site specific methodology

Standard entomological survey techniques were utilised during the survey, with specific reference to Natural England Research Report NERR005. For terrestrial species, bare ground and mosses were hand-searched, and low-growing vegetation was beaten using a net and stick. Plant dwelling and airborne species were surveyed using a sweep net, or by visual inspection of specific features, such as flowers or sunlit leaves.

The assessment was undertaken by Allen and Mellon Environmental on behalf of DAERA (Date: 25th May 2024). The condition assessment of the terrestrial invertebrate species features was undertaken by recording a number of key feature attributes at a series of pre-determined areas based on the previous CSM report for the site carried out in 2007.

A number of target notes were collected to further inform the condition and ecological interest across the full extent of the site.

6. Results

At Binevenagh ASSI, 2 invertebrate features were assessed against targets. The detailed condition assessment attributes are displayed in the Appendix 1 – Attribute Tables where they are measured against set condition assessment targets.

Grassland (inland) assemblage

Table 3: Summary table of all attributes assessed against set criteria

1 Direct Attribute assessed:	0 Favourable
	1 Unfavourable
1 Indirect Attribute assessed:	0 Favourable
	1 Unfavourable

Binevenagh ASSI feature has 0 attributes in favourable condition and 2 attributes in unfavourable condition. Therefore, this ASSI feature is in unfavourable condition. See discussion for full details on reasoning.

Wet Seepage assemblage

Table 4: Summary table of all attributes assessed against set criteria

1 Direct Attribute assessed:	1 Favourable
	0 Unfavourable
1 Indirect Attribute assessed:	1 Favourable
	0 Unfavourable

Binevenagh ASSI feature has 2 attributes in favourable condition and 0 attributes in unfavourable condition. Therefore, this ASSI feature is in favourable condition. See discussion for full details on reasoning.

Open Rock (lowland) assemblage

Not assessed (see Section 8).

7. Discussion

Grassland (inland) assemblage

The grassland (inland) assemblage of Binevenagh ASSI is in **Unfavourable** condition because it failed on one direct attribute and one indirect attribute.

None of the four target Coleoptera species were recorded during the survey, whereas 50% were recorded in 2007 (see Table 5). Additionally, the grassland habitat is currently overgrazed, with a short sward and few flowering plants.

The Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth *Hemaris tityus* has been added as a future target species for this assemblage, since this species was recorded during fieldwork. The solitary bee *Andrena ruficollis* was found outside the site on the approach to the ASSI but could reasonably be expected to occur in the ASSI on scattered willows within the grassland habitat. This was recorded around

1.1km east of the boundary during the survey. It is a northern-biased species in Britain which typically inhabits cooler climes with abundant willow (Salix) growth. It is currently classed as 'Rare' (RDB3) in Britain. Being a mobile species, it would be expected to find this species in suitable habitat within the ASSI. The area of willow scrub along the western boundary could therefore be deemed important to this species' survival in Ireland and potential nesting sites in the more open grassland areas should be targeted in future monitoring.

Table 5: Target species in 2007 & 2024

Feature	Target	2007 Results	2024 Results
Grassland (inland) assemblage	*Harpalus latus* (Coleoptera: Carabidae)	Not recorded	Not recorded
	Olisthopus rotundatus (Coleoptera: Carabidae)	Not recorded	Not recorded
	Amischa bifoveolata (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae)	Recorded	Not recorded
	Perapion violaceum (Coleoptera: Apionidae).	Recorded	Not recorded
	New target species (2024) Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk- moth *Hemaris tityus* (Lepidoptera: Sphingidae)	Not Recorded	Recorded
	New target species (2024) Northern Sallow Mining Bee *Andrena ruficollis* (Hymenoptera: Andrenidae)	Not Recorded	Recorded (outside ASSI)

The target list for future CSM monitoring has therefore increased to 6 species, with the presence of 50% or more required to indicate favourable condition.

Wet seepage assemblage

The wet seepage assemblage of Binevenagh ASSI is in **Favourable** condition because at least 50% of the target species were recorded and the habitat was in good condition.
Only one of the three original target species *Gerris costae* (Hemiptera) was recorded in 2024. However, this habitat was found to support a diverse species assemblage of Diptera with many species which have larval stage aquatic lifecycles. This includes the presence of species from the families Empididae, Ephydridae and Pediciidae. The diversity of invertebrate species in addition to the floral diversity and general habitat conditions provided a Favourable condition assessment.

The following species which were recorded have been added as target species:

- The dagger-flies *Kowarzia bipunctata*, *Rhamphomyia curvula* and *Empis verralli* (all family Empididae)

Kowarzia bipunctata is a localised species with few records in Ireland that is restricted to seepages, streams and minor river habitats. Its presence can be used to monitor the hydrological connectivity of the lough to the wet seepage habitat.

Rhamphomyia curvula
Binevenagh represents the first and only Irish site for this species. It is a montane species associated with damp habitats and is listed as Nationally Scarce in Britain. It was recorded east of the boundary of the ASSI, but similar habitats exist within the ASSI, and it would reasonably be expected to occur there.

Empis verralli
One specimen was collected by sweeping the banks of the lough outlet. This is the first record of this species from Northern Ireland.

Open rock (lowland) assemblage

The open rock (lowland) assemblage of Binevenagh ASSI was not assessed.

Two of the target attributes were not covered by survey work in 2007 or 2024. Planaria and Chilopoda are specialised groups which are seldom recorded but the species listed are likely to be widespread in various habitats. Neither was looked for in the 2007 or 2024 projects.

The remaining target species *Columella aspera* (Mollusca), whilst searched for, was not found in 2024. This species is widespread across various habitat types and has not been identified as being of conservation importance in Northern Ireland.

As no additional suitable target species were recorded in 2024 this feature should be excluded from future monitoring.

8. Feature Recommendations

Habitat Management

It is recommended that the grazing regime of the grasslands should be reviewed and altered to facilitate an increase in the abundance of flowering plants, which would be expected to benefit the assemblage of both herbivorous and pollinating insects.

It should be noted however, that under-grazing could reduce the site coverage of bare rock and bare soil. It is important that these habitat features are retained, as one of the target species (*Olisthopus rotundatus*) is xerophilous, requiring dry habitats without excessive vegetation.

Under-grazing could also result in scrub encroachment, notably from Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* which would be expected to have a detrimental effect on the grassland assemblage. One potential area of conflict may be in relation to management of the grassland habitat to maintain suitable conditions for grassland fungi, notably waxcaps *Hygrocybe sp.*. It is recommended that the current grazing regime be reviewed, and if necessary, adjusted so as to facilitate the continued existence of grassland fungi at the site, but also to improve floristic diversity and consequently to improve insect abundance and diversity. The wet seepage and open rock habitats require no changes to their current management regimes.

Removal of feature

The open rock (lowland) assemblage should be removed as a feature for the reasons provided above.

Removal of target species

ASSI Feature 2 Wet Seepages

The following species should be removed as a target species for this habitat assemblage for the reasons provided above:

- The flatworm *Phagocata vitta* (family Planariidae)

9. References

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11. Appendix 1 Attribute tables

Table 6: Grassland (inland) Assemblage Attribute Table

Attributes	Target	Method of Assessment	Monitoring Results [2024]	Assessment	Monitoring Results [2007]
Direct Attributes					
Presence of key species	Presence of at least 50% of target species The original target species are: Order Coleoptera: *Harpalus latus* and *Olisthopus rotundatus* (both family Carabidae) *Amischa bifoveolata* (family Staphylinidae) *Perapion violaceum* (family Apionidae). New target species (2024) - Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth *Hemaris tityus* (Lepidoptera: Sphingidae) Northern Sallow Mining Bee *Andrena ruficollis* (Hymenoptera: Andrenidae)	Methods: sweeping and ground searching.	One of the five target species was recorded, plus another one beyond the ASSI boundary. None of the four target Coleoptera species were recorded during the survey. It is recommended that Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth *Hemaris tityus* (family Sphingidae) is added as a future target for the grassland assemblage. This is an uncommon species of semi-natural grassland, bog margins and marshes which is listed as Vulnerable in Ireland and is a UK Priority Species. It is also recommended that Northern Sallow Mining Bee *Andrena ruficrus* (family Andrenidae) is added as a future target species.	Unfavourable	Favourable
Indirect Attributes					

Vegetation height (sward structure)	Management of grazing to produce a varied sward structure	Visual	The grassland appeared to be heavily sheep grazed with a short sward and few flowering plants.	Unfavourable	Not assessed

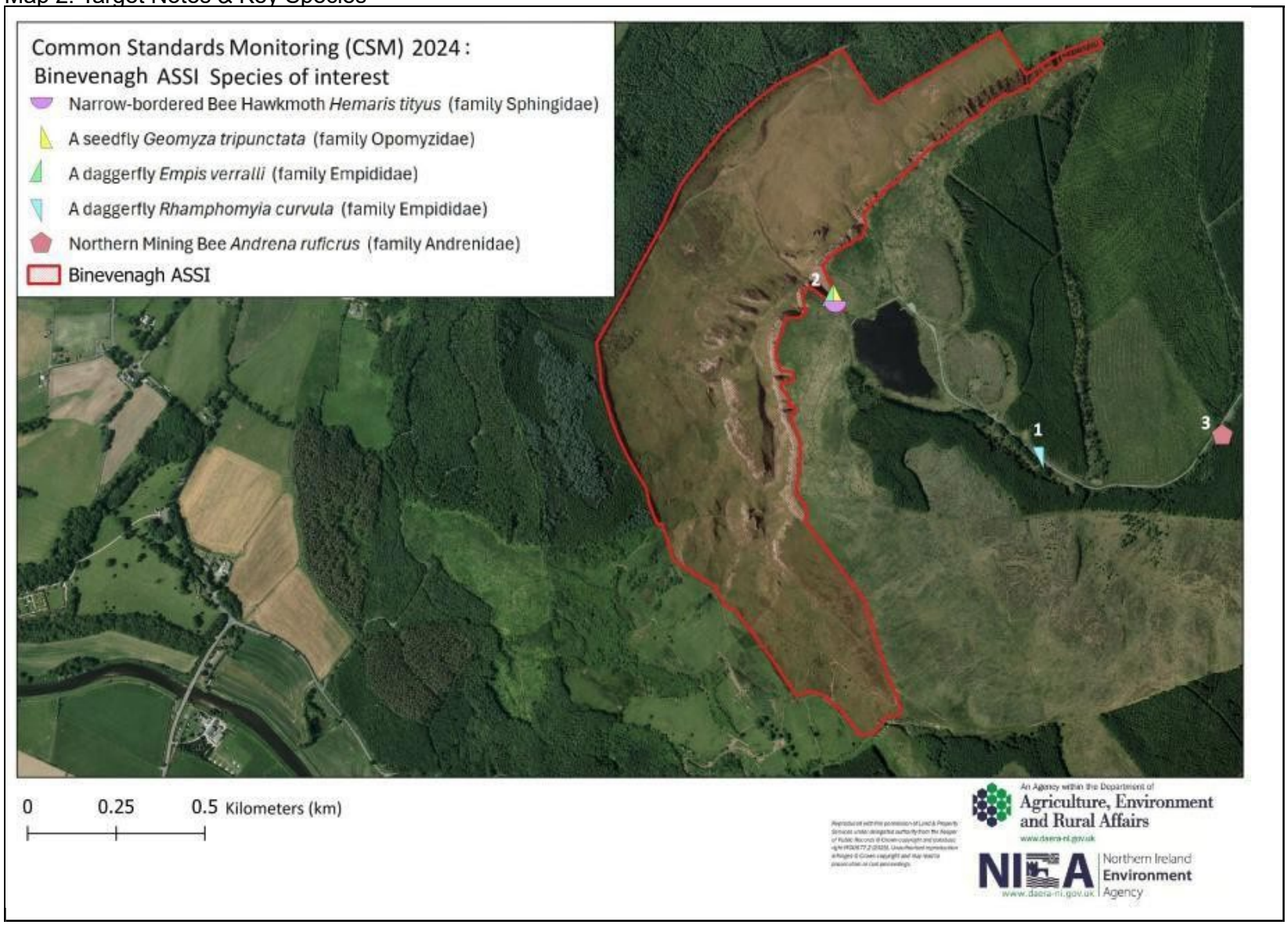
Table 7: Wet Seepages Assemblage Attribute Table

Attributes	Target	Method of Assessment	Monitoring Results [2024]	Assessment	Monitoring Results [2007]
Direct Attributes					
Presence of key species	Presence of at least 50% of target species (including new targets) The three original target species are: Order Coleoptera: *Hydroporus longulus* (family Hydrophilidae) *Stenichnus collaris* (family Scydmaenidae), Order Heteroptera: *Gerris costae* (family Gerridae).	Methods: sweeping and ground searching.	Four of the six target species were recorded Planaria were not covered by the monitoring work in 2024, hence one of the target species was not searched for. This has been removed from the target species list for this attribute. *Gerris costae* was recorded in the outflow of Binevenagh Lake. This area had a diverse species assemblage of Diptera, many of which have an aquatic larval stage in their lifecycles.	Favourable	Favourable

	New target species (2024) - <u>Order Diptera</u> *Kowarzia bipunctata*, *Rhamphomyia curvula* and *Empis verralli* (all family Empididae)		This includes dagger-fly species such as: *Empis verralli* and *Kowarzia bipunctata* (family Empididae), It is recommended that both species are added as targets for the wet seepage assemblage. *Kowarzia bipunctata* is a localised species with few records in Ireland that is restricted to seepages, streams and minor river habitats. *Empis verralli* was a first record for NI. A third species of dagger-fly *Rhamphomyia curvula* which was found outside the site should also be added as a target. This was a first Irish record for the species. The diversity of invertebrate species in addition to the floral diversity and general habitat conditions provided a Favourable condition assessment.		
Indirect Attributes					
Extent of habitat	No change to current management	Visual	The diversity of invertebrate species in addition to the floral diversity and general habitat conditions provided a Favourable condition assessment	Favourable	Not assessed

12. Appendix 2 Maps

Map 2: Target Notes & Key Species



13. Appendix 3 Target notes

Table 8: Target notes recorded within Binevenagh ASSI and its surrounds (see Map 2)

Target Note Number	Comments
1	The *Rhamphomyia curvula* (Diptera: Empididae) new to Ireland was found by sweeping flowering *Sorbus aucuparia* in proximity to the site. This pollinator resource is essential for many invertebrates which utilise the site particularly with the notable lack of flowering floral assemblage within the site.
2	*Kowarzia bipunctata* (Diptera: Empididae) a localised species of Empididae with few records in Ireland and restricted to seepages, streams and minor river habitats. This species can be found by sweeping over the flowing outlet stream in the wet seepage amongst other aquatic Diptera.
3	*Andrena ruficrus* (Hymenoptera: Andrenidae) was recorded around 1.1km east of the boundary during the survey. This is a northern- biased species in Britain which typically inhabits cooler climes with abundant willow (*Salix*) growth. The area of willow scrub along the western boundary could therefore be deemed important to this species' survival in Ireland. Nesting sites should be targeted and identified in future surveys. The specimen will be lodged in the Ulster Museum.

14.Appendix 4 Photographs









Photo; (A) Seepage habitat located at the outflow of Binevenagh Lake, (B) scree and grassland habitat located near the base o f the cliff face, (C) seepage habitat located at the outflow of Binevenagh Lake and (D) grassland habitat located on the lower slopes at the base of the cliff face.









Photo; (E) Moorland pondskater (*Gerris costae*) (Order Heteroptera, family Gerridae) recorded in the outflow of Binevenagh Lake (Image courtesy of Maxime Vasseur), (F) the dance fly *Rhamphomyia curvula* (Order Diptera, family Empididae) recorded for the first time in Ireland, approximately 1.2km east of the site boundary, (G) Northern sallow mining bee (*Andrena ruficrus*) (Order Hymenoptera, family Andrenidae) recorded for the first time in Ireland approximately 1.1km east of the site boundary and (H) the ground beetle *Carabus glabratus* (Order Coleoptera, family Carabidae) recorded in the grassland below the cliff face.

15. Appendix 5 Survey dates

Table 9: Survey dates and locations monitored

Survey dates	Survey Staff	Total	Locations Monitored	Weather Conditions
25/05/2024	Owen Beckett, Ryan Mitchell	2	Binevenagh ASSI	Warm and slightly overcast

16.Appendix 6 - Species list

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