

# ***The Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey: What have we learned?***

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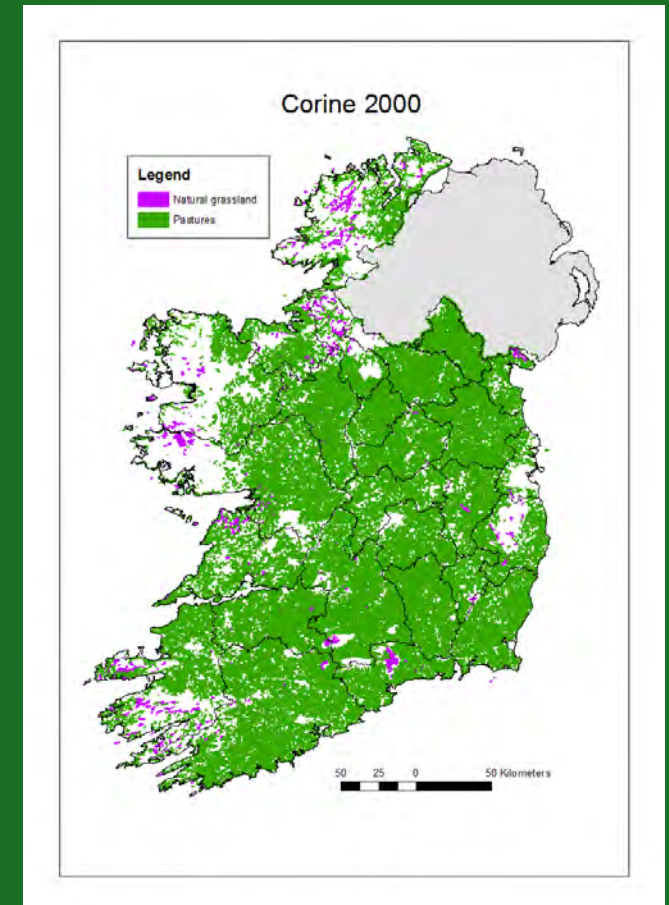
**Irish BSBI Members' Conference  
29<sup>th</sup> March 2014**





## Background information on Irish grassland

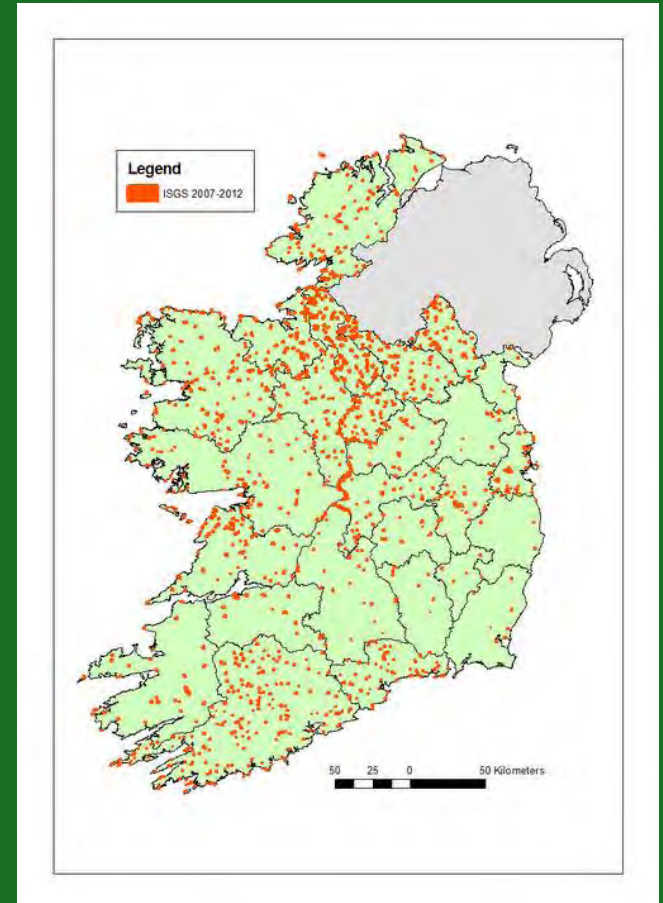
- Approximately 60% of Ireland covered by grassland habitats
- Most of this is improved or semi-improved, only a small proportion semi-natural
- *Semi-natural* grassland = altered by human agricultural/pastoral activity but not highly modified from fertilisers or reseeded



## Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey 2007-2012 (ISGS)

### WHY THE NEED FOR IT?

- No comprehensive survey of semi-natural grasslands done before
- Update our knowledge of semi-natural grasslands in Ireland
- Provide data on EU Annex I grassland habitats: reporting obligations under EU Habitats Directive
- More detailed grassland classification system for Ireland



Location of ISGS sites



*Trifolium pratense* – *Plantago lanceolata* vegetation community  
EU Annex I habitat: Lowland Hay Meadows 6510



Shannon Callows, Co. Roscommon

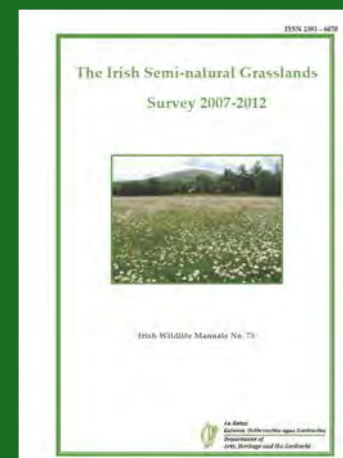


## Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey: Project summary

- Survey fieldwork took place between May 2007 and September 2012
  - Funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Dept. Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht)
- All 26 counties surveyed
  - Greatest survey effort in counties with lowest agricultural intensity
- 23,188 ha surveyed across 1,192 sites
  - Majority of sites lowland grassland
  - Dataset does not include dune or machair grasslands
- Data entered into a Turboveg 2.0 database, sent to NBDC

## Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey: Main project outputs

- Large botanical database: 4,544 grassland relevés
- GIS dataset with all sites digitally mapped to:
  - Heritage Council habitat classification scheme (Fossitt 2000)
  - EU Annex I habitats
- Data on Annex I grassland habitats (high conservation value)
- A proposed new grassland classification system for Ireland
- 5 Annual reports plus a summary national report





# ***The Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey:***

## ***What have we learned?***



**Quick answer: We have a LOT of wet grassland!**



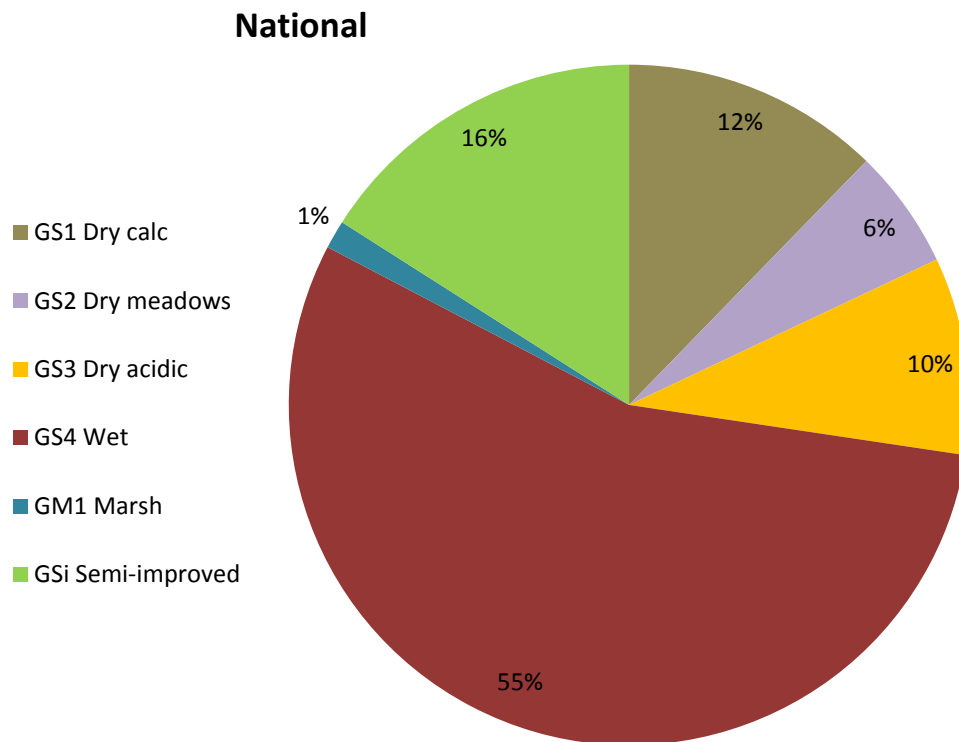
Derrylosset, Co. Monaghan







# Average national proportion of grassland types

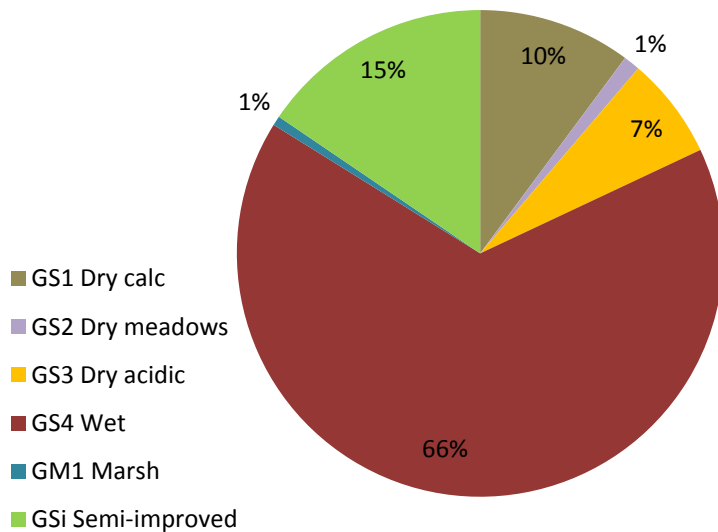




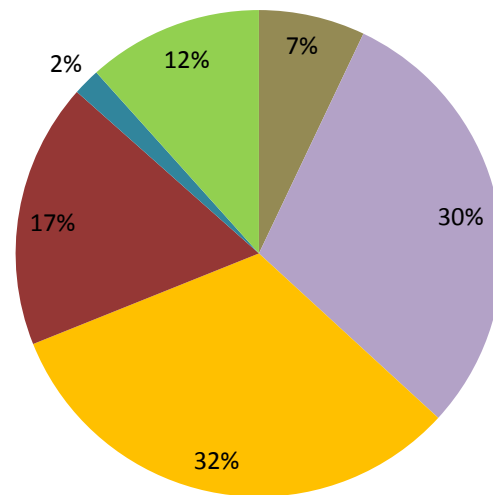
But there is wide regional variation...



**Border**

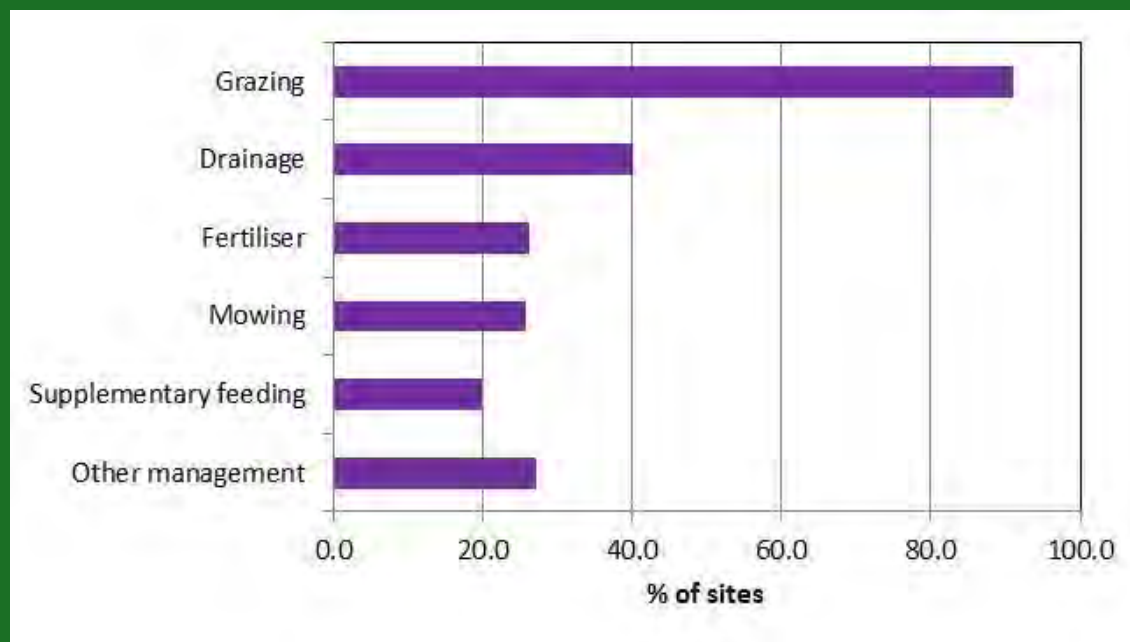


**Mid-East & Dublin**





# Main management activities on Irish grasslands



91% of sites grazed





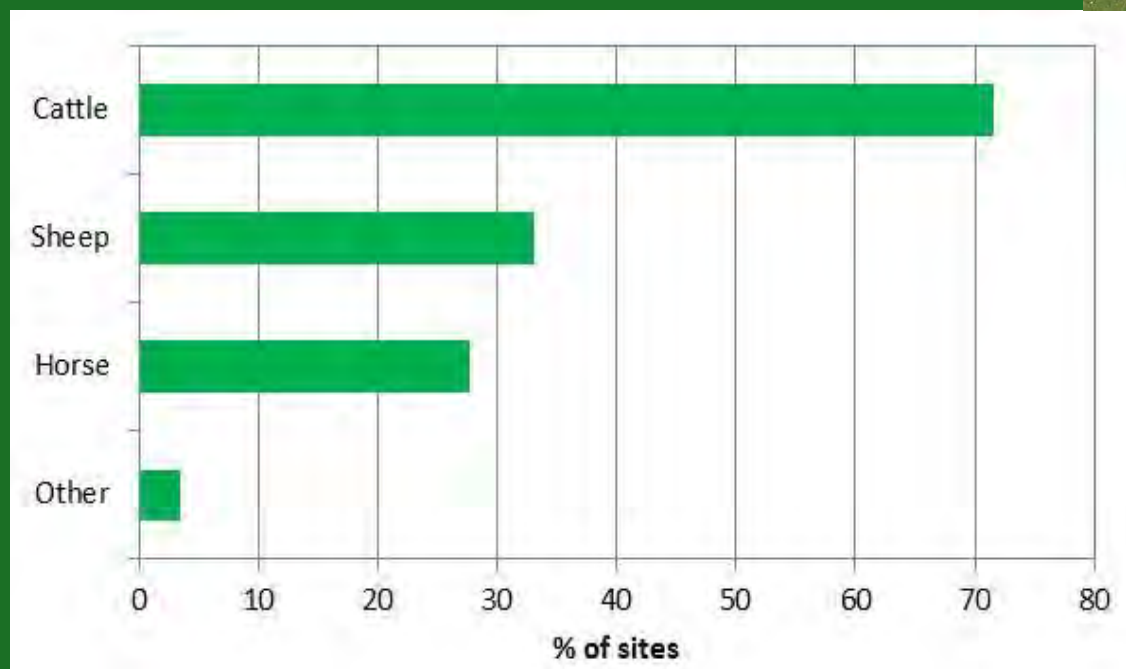
Alpaca in Co. Clare!







# Main grazers of Irish grasslands



72% of all sites grazed by cattle

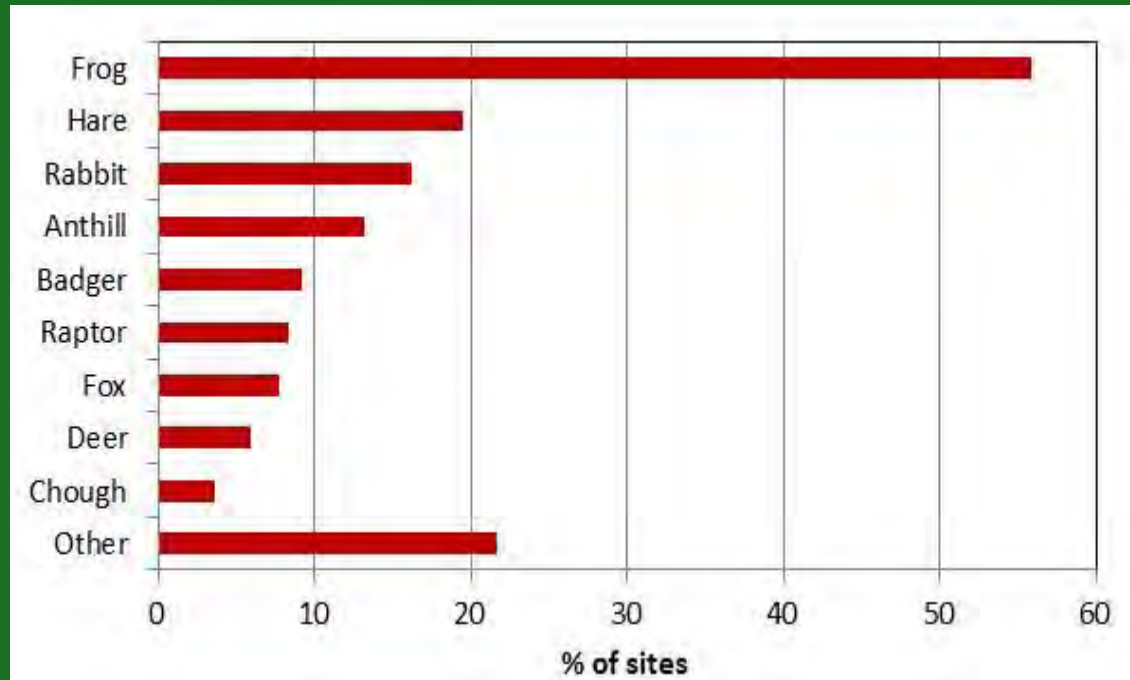




Extra help recording in Co. Galway!



# Main wild fauna recorded in Irish grasslands



Frogs recorded in 56% of grassland sites





## Occurrence of semi-natural grassland in protected areas

- 26% of sites wholly or partly in a (p)NHA
- 20% of sites occur in an SAC
- 45% of sites occur in one or the other, or both
- 5% of the area surveyed during ISGS was Annex I habitat
  - [\*]6210 Calcareous grassland [including orchid-rich variant]
  - \*6230 Species-rich *Nardus* grassland of upland areas
  - 6410 *Molinia* meadows
  - 6430 Hydrophilous tall herb swamp
  - 6510 Lowland hay meadows
- More \*6230 is likely to be found as upland areas not yet fully surveyed



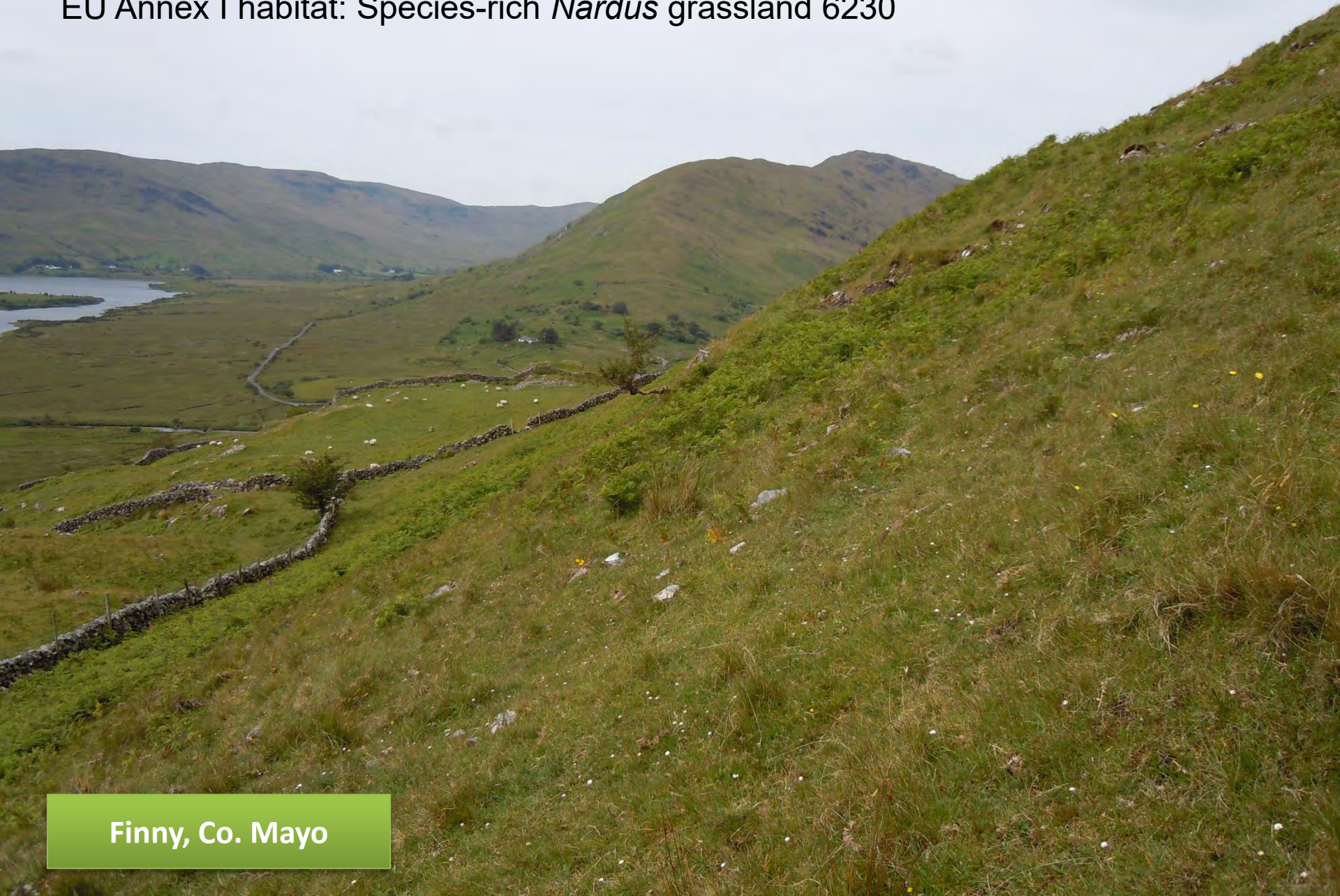
*Briza media* – *Thymus polytrichus* vegetation community  
EU Annex I habitat: Dry calcareous grassland 6210



Keelhilla, Co. Clare



*Nardus stricta* – *Festuca ovina* vegetation community  
EU Annex I habitat: Species-rich *Nardus* grassland 6230



Finny, Co. Mayo





*Molinia caerulea* – *Succisa pratensis* vegetation community  
Alliance: Junco-Molinion (Syn. Molinion caeruleae)  
EU Annex I habitat: 6410 *Molinia* meadows



*Agrostis stolonifera* – *Filipendula ulmaria* vegetation community

Alliance: Filipendulion

EU Annex I habitat: Hydrophilous tall herb swamp 6430



Tulcon, Co. Leitrim



*Festuca rubra* – *Plantago lanceolata* vegetation community  
EU Annex I habitat: Lowland hay meadow 6510



Glencolumbkille, Co. Clare



## New classification system for Irish grasslands proposed

- Four main grassland groups
  - Two wet, two dry
- 19 different vegetation communities
  - 9 wet
  - 3 humid
  - 6 dry
- Allows more detailed and informative mapping to be carried out



## **Irish Semi-natural Grasslands Survey: Who are the beneficiaries?**

- Grassland managers (e.g. farmers, landowners)
- National Parks & Wildlife Service staff: concerned with EU Annex I habitats
- Ecological professionals (mapping/describing grassland habitats)
- Anyone with an interest in conserving part of our natural heritage

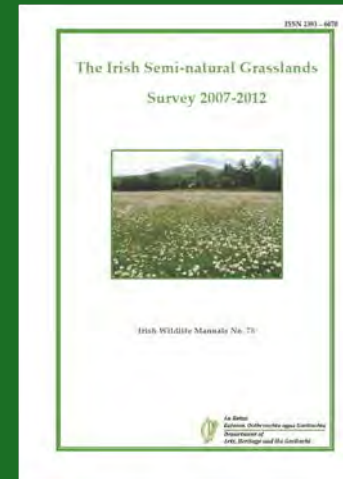


# Report

- Full report downloadable from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie) or [www.botanicalenvironmental.com](http://www.botanicalenvironmental.com)
- All previous ISGS reports downloadable from [www.botanicalenvironmental.com](http://www.botanicalenvironmental.com)

## Key for grassland classification

- Email me:  
[foneill@botanicalenvironmental.com](mailto:foneill@botanicalenvironmental.com)





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