



# Bogs of County Roscommon

## County Roscommon

Roscommon is an inland county covering an area of approximately 2,500 square kilometres. The landscape is generally flat with gentle rolling hills. Only in some northern parts of the county does the land rise above 250m with the highest point 400m, on the County Leitrim border.

Most of the county is underlain with Carboniferous Limestone. There are a few pockets of sandstone, in the north, west and east of the county.

The River Suck lies to the west and south of the county, while the mighty River Shannon and Lough Ree flow along the eastern border. There are a number of large lakes scattered throughout the county.

## Bogs in Ireland

It is estimated that in Ireland bogs originally covered an area of around 1.2 million hectares, about 17% of the land surface. Today there are about 200,000 hectares in 600 bogs.

## Peat Bogs in County Roscommon

Around seventy bogs can be found in County Roscommon. The majority are raised bogs but some blanket bog occurs on high ground in north Roscommon at Kilronan & Corry mountain.

## Peat harvesting

For generations peat has been used as solid fuel for cooking and heating. In early summer the peat is cut into sods. The sods are harvested after drying in the sun. After a few weeks of drying the sods are removed from the bog to storage until needed for fuel.



## Bogs of County Roscommon

## Some bogs in County Roscommon...

Bellanagare

Cloonchambers (Castlerea)

Clooneigh (Roscommon)

Cranberry (Ballinasloe)

Knockvicar

Corry Mountain  
(North Roscommon)

Kilteevan (Roscommon)

Kilronan Mountain  
(North Roscommon)

Mount Dillon  
(Termonbarry)

Some Bogs are designated as:  
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)  
Special Protection Area (SPA)  
Natural Heritage Area (NHA)  
under EU or Irish legislation.



## Plantlife of Bogs

Because of the acid soil and low nutrients bogs usually have a very limited number of flowering plant species. Sphagnum moss, heather, furze and bracken are the dominant plants in most bogs. Birch, willow and foxglove are also common at the edge of many bogs. The introduced and brightly coloured rose-bay willowherb flowers in July and August and is a common sight along many bog margins.

Foxglove



Furze



## Sphagnum Moss

Without sphagnum mosses bogs would not exist. The surface of bogs is composed of living sphagnum moss. This is floating on a thick layer of waterlogged and partially rotted plant material. Sphagnum moss can hold up to 20 times its own weight in water.

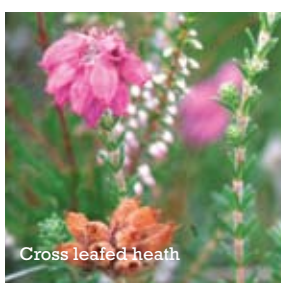
There are several different species of sphagnum mosses. Some sphagnum species grow only a few mm per year while other species can grow up to 10cm in a year.



Sphagnum moss



Heather - Ling



Cross leaved heath

## Heather

The most characteristic plant of bogs is heather, a family of evergreen shrubs that can cover a large area of any bog. Bogs are sometimes referred to as 'heaths', the name from heather.

Several species of heather grow wild in Ireland. Heather species growing wild in bogs in County Roscommon include ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). In the far west of Ireland more species grow and some are very rare.

Bell heather and ling heather are common on the drier parts of the bog while cross-leaved heath prefers wetter bog.

## Special Plants to Bogs

Some species of wildflowers grow almost exclusively in bogs. These include bog asphodel, bog bean, bog cotton, bog myrtle, bilberry, cranberry and alder buckthorn.



Alder Buckthorn



Bilberry



Bog Cotton



Bog Asphodel Seed

## Wildlife of Bogs

Bogs host an interesting and diverse array of wildlife including wildflowers, lichens, butterflies, birds and insects.



Stonechat



Dragonfly



Marsh Fritillary



Grasshopper

## Lichens in Bogs

In some bogs several species of lichens can be very common. The matchstick lichen (*Cladonia Sp*) is common and most distinctive with its bright red colouring and its similarity to a match stick.



Lichen Cladonia

## Carnivorous Plants

Bog soil is naturally low in nutrients, however some bogs plants have adapted and devised a way to attract and trap insects. These carnivorous plants are unique in that they derive nutrients for growth by digesting insects. In Ireland, butterworts, sundews and bladderworts are all carnivorous plants that grow only in bogs.

The butterworts and sundews use sticky glue to capture insects while the bladderworts use a suction vacuum.



Sundew

## Birds of Bogs

The main birds observed in bogs in County Roscommon include nesting snipe, meadow pipit, stonechat and willow warbler.

Kestrel can often be seen hovering above searching for small mammals below.



Kestrel

## Insects & Dragonflies

In summer many species of fly inhabit bogs and some fall prey to carnivorous plants. Grasshopper can also be observed in many bogs.

Damselflies and dragonflies are insects that mainly hunt for flies over water and the still water of a bog hole is ideal. The channel of water left after turf cutting is ideal for a hunting dragonfly. The four-spotted libellula dragonfly is active during the summer months and is common in many bogs in County Roscommon.



Ideal habitat for Dragonfly

## Butterflies & Moths of Bogs

The large heath butterfly can be found almost exclusively in bogs.

The green hairstreak and marsh fritillary are also common. The day flying latticed heath moth and the night flying emperor moth are also found almost exclusively in bogs.



Emperor Moth



Latticed Heath Moth



Furze



Alder Buckthorn



Carnivorous Butterwort



Cuckoo



Rosebay Willowherb

## What is Peat?

Peat is composed of organic matter from partially decayed plants. Peat has accumulated over a long number of years in waterlogged conditions.

It consists mainly of sphagnum moss as well as leaves, roots, seeds of other plants including grasses, sedges, shrubs and trees. Peat contains a high level of moisture and organic matter but is low in nutrients and is acidic. Micro-organisms are slow to complete decomposition of dead plants because of low oxygen in the waterlogged peat.

An area where peat forms is known as peatland or a bog.



Sphagnum Moss

## History of Bogs in Ireland

After the last ice age about 10,000 years ago, many small lakes were created in the landscape of central Ireland. Fen vegetation and poor drainage helped in the formation of peat. The partially decomposed vegetation accumulated over years and years giving us our bogs today. The history of vegetation in the Irish landscape can be traced through cores containing pollen and seeds from bogs.



Raised Bog

## Types of Bogs

There are three main types of bog in Ireland - blanket bog, raised bog and fen bog.

### Blanket Bog

Blanket bogs are areas of peat that form a carpet over a large area. Those found mainly in mountainous areas above 200 metres are known as mountain blanket bog. Lowland blanket bog is found below 200 metres particularly in western areas.

### Raised bog

Raised bogs are areas of peat that have developed in former lake basins. They are dome shaped and the peat can be several metres deep.

### Fen bog

Fens are areas of flat bog that occur around lake margins and in waterlogged areas with a supply of mineral rich waters.

## Bogs of County Roscommon



Raised bog habitat



Turf Cutting

[www.roscommoncoco.ie](http://www.roscommoncoco.ie)



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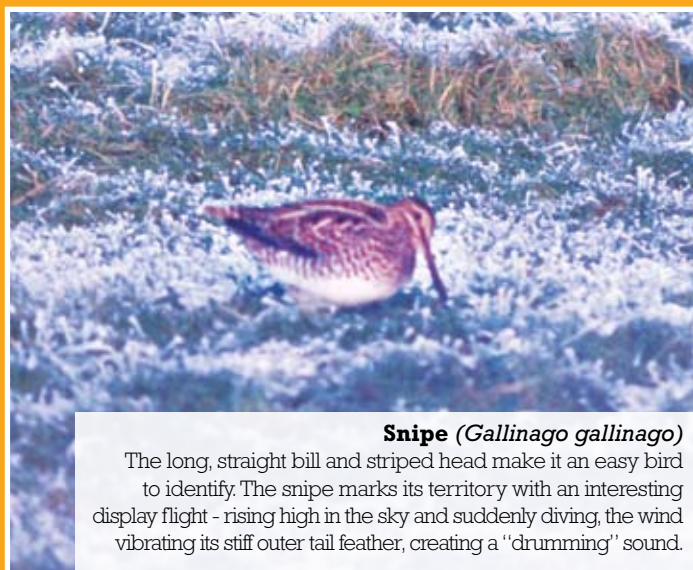
# Bog Wildlife in County Roscommon

## Look around you and see the wonderful selection of flowers & wildlife in our beautiful bogs...



**Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)**

The meadow pipit is a very common resident breeding bird of bogs and many other habitats in Roscommon. It resembles the lark but is slimmer and has a longer tail. Meadow pipit nests are often chosen by the cuckoo as host nest for their eggs.



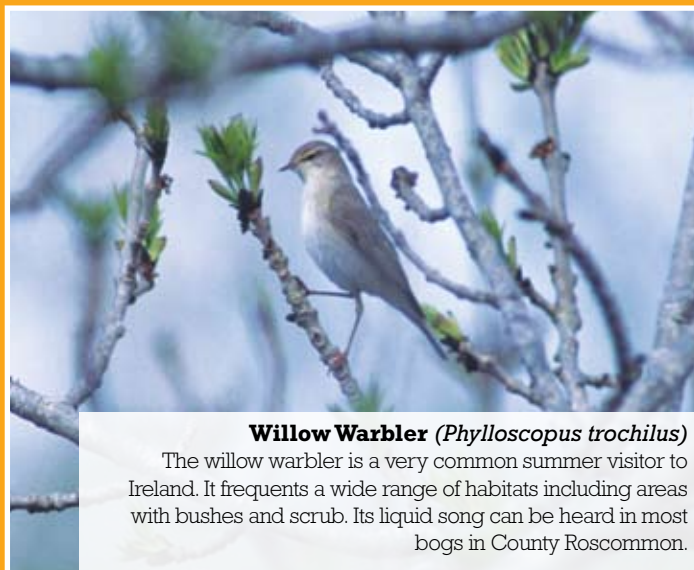
**Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)**

The long, straight bill and striped head make it an easy bird to identify. The snipe marks its territory with an interesting display flight - rising high in the sky and suddenly diving, the wing vibrating its stiff outer tail feather, creating a "drumming" sound.



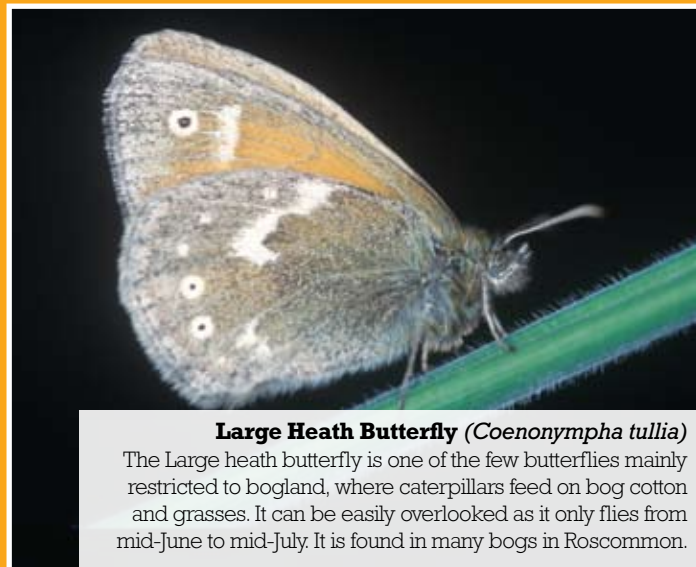
**The Snipe's Nest (*Gallinago gallinago*)**

The snipe nests on the ground in bogs and wet places. The nest is usually in a hollow lined with grass, near water. From April to August, four pear-shaped olive-brown or olive-green eggs are laid. It is a common resident breeding species in Roscommon.



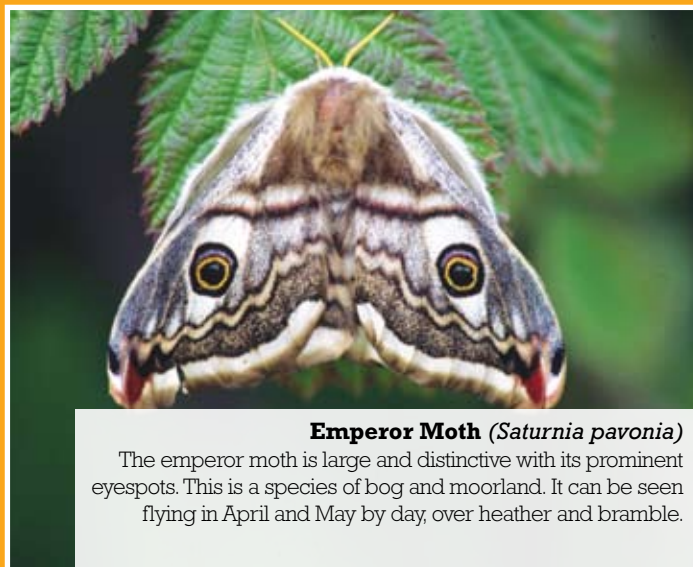
**Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)**

The willow warbler is a very common summer visitor to Ireland. It frequents a wide range of habitats including areas with bushes and scrub. Its liquid song can be heard in most bogs in County Roscommon.



**Large Heath Butterfly (*Coenonympha tullia*)**

The Large heath butterfly is one of the few butterflies mainly restricted to bogland, where caterpillars feed on bog cotton and grasses. It can be easily overlooked as it only flies from mid-June to mid-July. It is found in many bogs in Roscommon.



**Emperor Moth (*Saturnia pavonia*)**

The emperor moth is large and distinctive with its prominent eyespots. This is a species of bog and moorland. It can be seen flying in April and May by day, over heather and bramble.



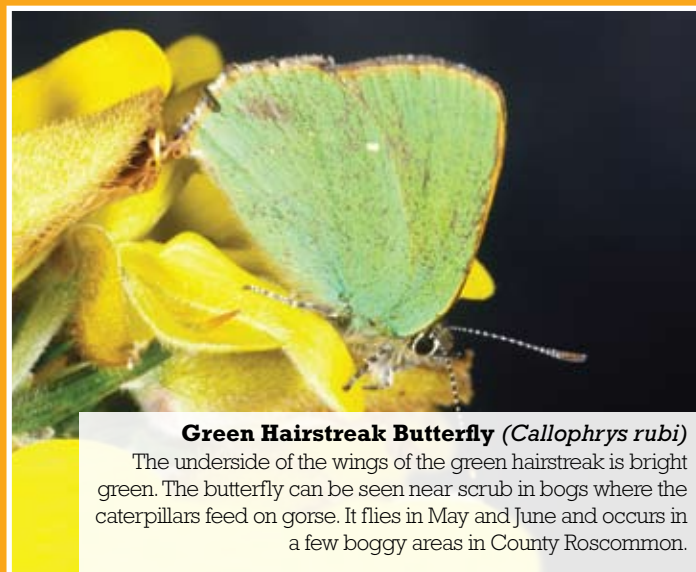
**Emperor Moth Caterpillar (*Saturnia pavonia*)**

The female lays the eggs in clusters on the branches of the food plant, usually heather and sometimes willow or bramble. The large, fat green caterpillars, ringed with black and white spots, feed in summer. However they are not easy to spot on heather.



**Marsh Fritillary (*Eurodryas aurinia*)**

The marsh fritillary occurs in boggy areas and in damp meadows where devil's-bit scabious, the food plant, grows. It flies in May and June and can be seen in many places in County Roscommon.



**Green Hairstreak Butterfly (*Callophrys rubi*)**

The underside of the wings of the green hairstreak is bright green. The butterfly can be seen near scrub in bogs where the caterpillars feed on gorse. It flies in May and June and occurs in a few boggy areas in County Roscommon.



**Damselfly (*Coenagrion* sp.)**

Damselflies are weak fliers, and rest with wings upright and touching each other. Of the eleven damselfly species recorded in Ireland, six species have blue markings. Damselflies are common in bogs throughout County Roscommon.



**Latticed Heath Moth (*Chiasmia clathrata clathrata*)**

This small and distinctive moth often perches with its wings open like a butterfly. Also, like a butterfly, it often flies by day. It can be seen from April to September in bogs and heaths. It is common in bogs in County Roscommon.



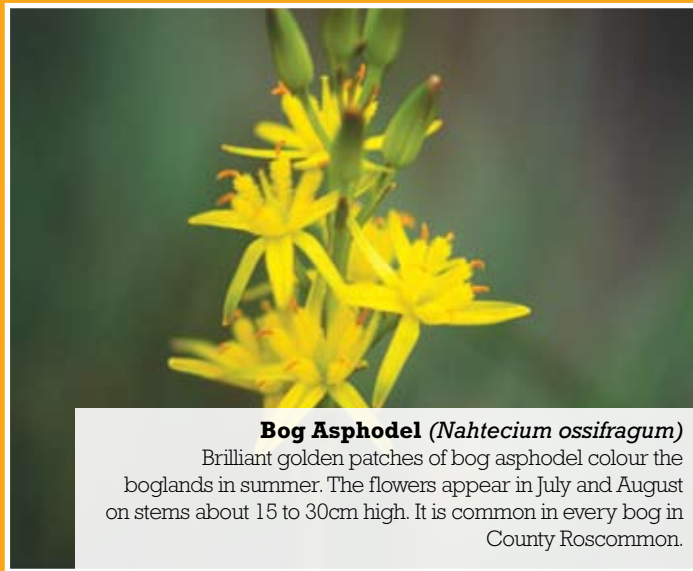
**Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*)**

This harmless-looking plant, with leaves arranged in a flat rosette, traps and eats insects. The fleshy leaves are covered with a sticky secretion. When an insect lands on the sticky surface the leaf curls to trap it.



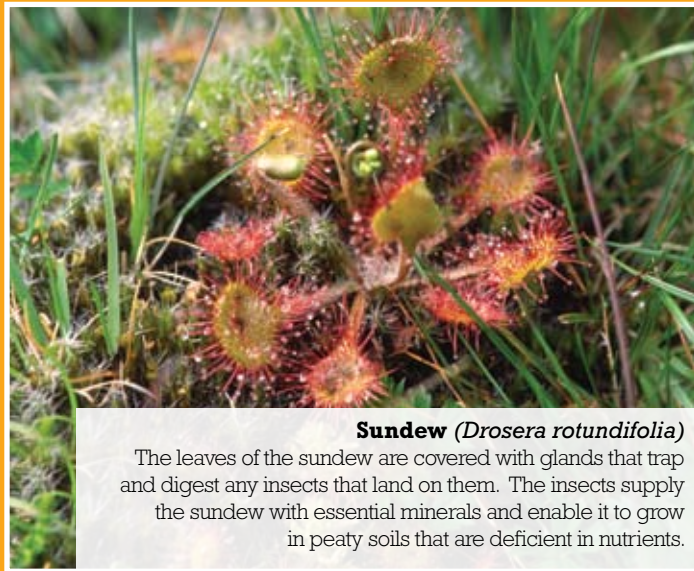
**Common Bog Cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*)**

In May and June great expanses of bog cotton with waving white downy heads can be seen on all bog in County Roscommon. The common bog cotton has five to seven nodding heads at the top of each stem.



**Bog Asphodel (*Nahtecium ossifragum*)**

Brilliant golden patches of bog asphodel colour the boglands in summer. The flowers appear in July and August on stems about 15 to 30cm high. It is common in every bog in County Roscommon.



**Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)**

The leaves of the sundew are covered with glands that trap and digest any insects that land on them. The insects supply the sundew with essential minerals and enable it to grow in peaty soils that are deficient in nutrients.



**Heather, Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*)**

Ling is the most common of all the heathers growing in bogs in County Roscommon and Ireland. It has pale purple, bell-shaped flowers that appear from July to September on a wiry stem up to 125cm high. The leaves are triangular and tiny.



**Cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*)**

The cross-leaved heath has leaves arranged around the stem in fours, like crosses. It has rose-pink bell-like flowers that appear in June and July. It is common throughout County Roscommon and prefers to grow in the wetter areas of bogs.



**Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*)**

Bell heather cannot tolerate wet conditions and is only common on the drier parts of the bog where it may co-dominate with ling heather. The flowers are red-purple but are sometimes white and appear from June to August.



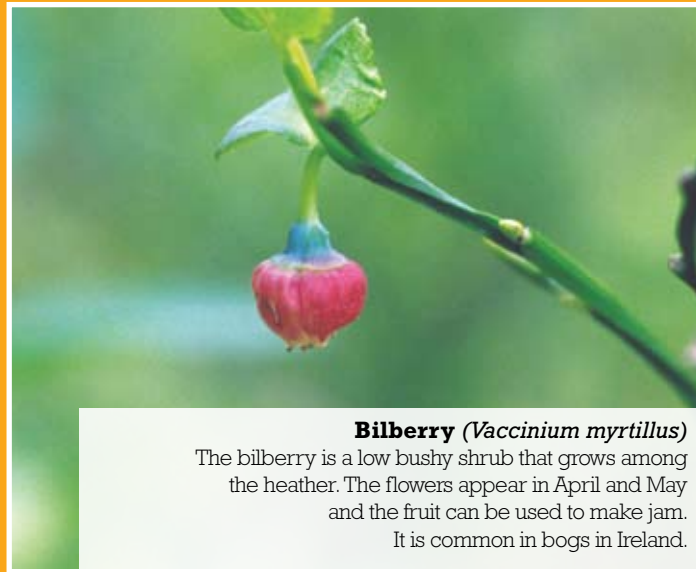
**Bog Bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*)**

The bog bean likes to grow in water up to one metre deep, but its leaves and flowers are held clear of the water surface. The spikes of pink and white flowers appear in May and June. It is common in County Roscommon in the wetter part of bogs.



**Pitcher-plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*)**

The pitcher plant flowers are dark red and about 7cm across. The flowers stand up to 45cm tall and appear from May to July. Native to America, it was introduced to Ireland in the early 1900's including a bog near the River Shannon in Roscommon.



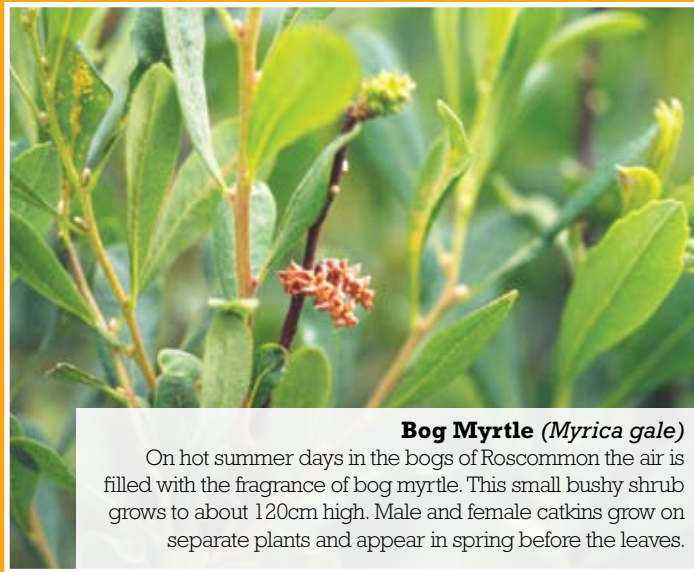
**Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)**

The bilberry is a low bushy shrub that grows among the heather. The flowers appear in April and May and the fruit can be used to make jam. It is common in bogs in Ireland.



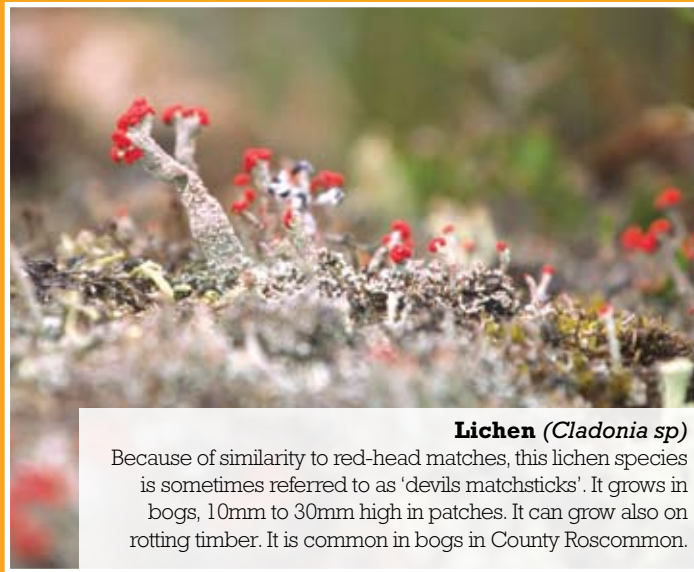
**Cranberry Flower (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*)**

The flowers appear in June and July. The fruit appear in August and September. The acid fruits of this low-growing shrub make a sauce to accompany turkey and venison. It grows in a few bogs in County Roscommon but is rare in Ireland.



**Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*)**

On hot summer days in the bogs of Roscommon the air is filled with the fragrance of bog myrtle. This small bushy shrub grows to about 120cm high. Male and female catkins grow on separate plants and appear in spring before the leaves.



**Lichen (*Cladonia* sp.)**

Because of similarity to red-head matches, this lichen species is sometimes referred to as 'devils matchsticks'. It grows in bogs, 10mm to 30mm high in patches. It can grow also on rotting timber. It is common in bogs in County Roscommon.