

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: GLENGARRIFF HARBOUR AND WOODLAND**

**SITE CODE: 000090**

Located to the south and north-west of Glengarriff Village in west Cork, this site consists of a glacial valley opening out into a sheltered bay with rocky islets. The valley contains Old Oak Woodland and Alluvial Forest, both habitats listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. The underlying rock of the area is Old Red Sandstone, with the soil varying from acid brown earths to alluvial brown earths and peat.

Glengarriff woodland consists of a sizeable area of broad-leaved semi-natural woodland comprised of Oak (*Quercus* sp.) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), with much Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). A little Yew (*Taxus baccata*) occurs and Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) is scattered through the woods. The most frequent ground plants are Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and ferns (*Pteridium aquilinum*, *Blechnum spicant* and *Dryopteris aemula*).

Wet woodland occurs along parts of the Canrooska and Glengarriff rivers. This is dominated by Willows (mainly *Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) and Downy Birch, with Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) also frequent. A rich herb layer is found, characterised by such species as Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Wood Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*). The rivers flood regularly, depositing silt within the woodlands.

However, there is much small-scale variation in the habitat from heathy places with Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), to rocks with Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), Navelwort (*Umbilicus rupestris*) or Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum* sp.). Common woodland herbs include Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*), Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*), Common Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum pratense*) and Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*).

Although this is the site of an ancient woodland, it was once part of an estate and much of the Oak was planted around 1807-1810. Some exotic species were also introduced, such as Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*). The last has invaded parts of the woodland posing a serious problem, however, it is being systematically removed. Other areas within the woodland have been planted with conifers including Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), Scot's Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*).

In addition to the woodlands, the harbour is of great interest. This sheltered inlet of Bantry Bay, has a rocky shore vegetated with brown seaweeds (*Pelvetia caniculata*, *Fucus* spp. and *Ascophyllum nodosum*). The inlet also features rocky islets.

Adding to the diversity of the site is a wet meadow, adjacent to the woodlands, which supports species such as Ragged-robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*). Smooth Brome (*Bromus racemosus*), a very rare Red Data Book species of grass, occurs here within this habitat.

The site is notable for the presence in the woodlands of several rare species of Myxomycete fungus, namely *Echinostelium colliculosum*, *Cribraria tenella*, *Arcyria affinis*, *Stemonitis nigrescens*, *Symphytocarpus impexus*, *Fuligo muscorum*, *Diderma deplanatum* and *D. lucidum*.

Overall, the site supports a diversity of fauna. The rocky islets in the harbour support the largest colony of Common Seals (*Phoca vitulina*) in the south-west of Ireland (maximum count, including pups, 1989-94 = 226). This legally protected species is listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive. Lesser Horseshoe Bats (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), also an Annex II species, were formerly recorded in high numbers in Glengarriff Castle (e.g. 300+ recorded during summer 1985, 268 in winter 1989). However numbers decreased at the Castle from the late 1990's onwards. Since then, summer roosts within the SAC boundary have been found in three buildings. The highest combined counts for the three summer sites were taken in July 2002 with a total of 228 bats. Bats have also been confirmed hibernating in one of the buildings and have used two purpose-built hibernacula. A total of 114 hibernating bats were counted in winter 2002/2003. This site is of international importance for both summer roosting and hibernating Lesser Horseshoe Bats. Given the combination of winter, summer and foraging sites, the site is one of the most important for the species in the south-west. An important roost of approximately 100 Long-eared Bats (*Plecotus auritus*) is also present within the site. Both bat species are listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive. The woods, and the river flowing through it, are home to a range of other mammal species, including Otter, Stoat, Red Squirrel, Badger and Sika Deer. Bird life is also diverse, with species such as Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Long-eared Owl, Woodcock, Heron, Jay, Dipper, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Wood Pigeon.

Invertebrates, too, are well represented. Species found include the Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*) a legally protected species, listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive; damselflies, such as the Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calypteryx virgo*, Order Zygoptera) and butterflies (Order Lepidoptera), such as Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*), Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), Purple Hairstreak (*Quercusia quercus*), Large Heath (*Coenonympha tullia*), Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*) and Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*). Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) has been recorded from rivers in the site. Other invertebrates reflect the ancient nature of the woodland, for example, Ireland's only arboreal ant (*Lasius fuliginosus*, Order Hymenoptera), a longhorn beetle (*Laptura aurilenta*, Order Coleoptera) and a hoverfly (*Microdon analis*, Order Diptera). Meanwhile, the association between woodland and bog provides the necessary requirements for species such as the Large Marsh Grasshopper (*Stethophyma grossum*, Order Orthoptera) and a Horse-fly (*Hybonutra mohlfeldi*, Order Diptera).

Most of the woodlands are a National Nature Reserve and as such are primarily managed for nature conservation and amenity purposes. However, some commercial forestry still occurs within the site. The harbour supports mariculture (rope grown mussels) and tourism (boats visiting Garinish Island) industries. Neither activity appears to have affected seal numbers, although increased disturbance may pose a threat. One of the main threats to the site, however, is housing developments within the woodland.

This site is of importance because it is the only sizeable area of old Oak woodland remaining in west Cork and is considered second only to Killarney as an example of Oceanic Sessile Oak/Holly woodlands. Furthermore, the site supports populations of four animal species listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive - Common Seal, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Kerry Slug.

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