SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: AVOCA RIVER VALLEY

SITE CODE: 001748

The Avoca River Valley is a large mixed woodland located in the valleys of the Avoca and Aughrim rivers, both of which flow through the site and on towards the estuary at Arklow.

The steep slopes of these deep valleys contain both coniferous and deciduous woodland. The best examples of relatively pure deciduous woods are found around Shelton Abbey, with several other smaller areas throughout the site. Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) is the dominant tree species, with Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) locally abundant. In places there is a well developed shrub layer of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*). The ground flora is variable and is usually predominated by Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) or Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). Other species present include Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*). Ferns are abundant and include Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Male-fern (*D. filix-mas*) and Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*).

A large area of the site consists of broadleaved woods which have been underplanted with a variety of conifers. Here, the understorey is generally similar to the broadleaved woods, but as the conifers become more abundant the ground flora becomes less diverse with Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) and some ferns replacing the other species.

There are a few blocks of commercial conifer plantations throughout the site, managed for forestry. Small areas of wet woodland with Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) and Downy Birch occur on the lower gradients adjacent to the rivers.

A study on the birds of this area has shown the commonest species to be Goldcrest, Robin, Wren, Coal Tit and Chaffinch. The rare Redstart has also been recorded.

This area has been subject to great disturbance from the mines at Avoca, the planting of conifers and from air pollution emanating from the fertiliser factory downstream, near Arklow. The eastern part of the site has been more affected by pollution than the western end.

It remains however, a site of considerable importance as it contains good examples of deciduous woodland with a typical flora and fauna and some rare species occurring. These areas are remnants of more extensive deciduous woodland coverage throughout these valleys and it is important to conserve this dwindling resource.

25.11.2009