SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MOUNT ST. JOSEPH WOODS

SITE CODE: 000913

About 4km west of Roscrea in Co. Offaly, two low esker ridges flank the Little Brosna River. The Mount St. Joseph Woods proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA) constitutes four esker woodland blocks of which three are on the northern, and one on the southern of these eskers.

Sharps, or Coolock Wood, the most southern of the blocks, has recently been damaged, with the natural Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) woodland already having suffered spruce (*Picea* spp.) planting. With the removal of Hazel and replanting with spruce, Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), much of the natural character of the wood has been lost. Areas of mature spruce remain. The block north of Mount St. Joseph Abbey consists of a high ridge to the west with planted woodland of Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), elm (*Ulmus* spp.), Hawthorn (*Crateagus monogyna*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria* agg.) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and a well developed ground flora. To the east of this block the canopy is more natural in character, being almost entirely oak. The ground flora is however damaged by cattle. There is another stand of oak at the western extremity of the western block, the east of this block is a fine stand of Hazel scrub. East is another intact section of oakwood.

Where the ground flora is well developed, it is species-rich, with species such as Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Wood-sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Ivy (*Hedera helix*).

Much of the pre-existing esker woodland has been felled or modified at this site, so the least altered remnant sections described above are of importance, especially the oak sections because such woodlands are particularly uncommon. The maltreated Sharps Wood has been retained in the NHA because the replanted tree species composition includes native broadleaved species, and mature oak have been retained.

13.11.2009