SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: KILLALA ESKER

SITE CODE: 001517

Situated just south of Killala, this esker ridge forms a prominent feature in the north Mayo landscape. The main Ballina road cuts through the site. The steep north and north -eastern sides of the esker are covered in dense woodland predominantly composed of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with scattered willows (*Salix cinerea* and *S. caprea*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*).

The ground flora also contains an unusual diversity of species for this region. The herb species include Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) which indicate that the esker gravels have a strong calcareous content.

The western influence is shown by the abundance of ferns such as Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilitata*), Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*D. aemula*) and also by a large leafy liverwort *Plagiochila asplenioides*.

The thick canopy of the wood also supports many local bird species such as Blackbird, Chaffinch, Robin, Dunnock, and Willow Warbler.

Eskers are interesting geomorphological features which were formed during the last Ice Age. They reach their best development in Ireland. Many have been destroyed by quarrying as they are comprised of valuable sand and gravel deposits. Wooded eskers are even more uncommon as many have been reclaimed for pasture.

Killala Esker is a fine example of this habitat type with relatively undisturbed woodland. It is also of regional importance as eskers are a more common feature of the Irish Midlands and are generally rare in north County Mayo.

23.11.2009