SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: EMO COURT

SITE CODE: 000865

Emo Court is an area within the Emo desmesne, 7km south of Portarlington, Co. Laois. It contains a large mixed woodland, a freshwater lake, parkland and amenity grassland which are surrounded by rich agricultural land and conifer plantations.

A semi-natural mixed woodland surrounds the lake on three sides and is comprised of a wide variety of native and exotic deciduous and coniferous species. The canopy is comprised of mature Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens*), Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Rowan (*Sorbus acuparia*), Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*) mixed with Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Sycamore (*Acer psuedoplatanus*) and a variety of exotic conifers. Within these woods, particularly near the lake, are spectacular, large specimens of Pedunculate Oak and Yew.

The ground flora is inhibited by the spread of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) in some areas but where it is not invasive there is a rich cover on the forest floor. The ground flora features Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and a variety of ferns and mosses. The woodland is the site of a rare Myxomycete fungus, *Stemonitis herbatica*.

Emo Lake is a medium sized shallow lake with an extensive fringe of reed-beds. The aquatic flora is rather sparse but there is a rich bird and invertebrate fauna. This lake is one of the few remaining freshwater lakes in County Laois. A study of its invertebrate fauna found it to contain several species of interest such as the Cladocera species *Scapholeberis mucronata* and *Disparalona rostrata*, which is rare in the British Isles, and the Copepoda species, *Eudiaptomus gracilis.*

Several areas of conifer plantation were also included in the site to retain what is left of the woodland cover around the lake. Rowan, Ash and other native trees are naturally regenerating within and on the margins of these plantations. Some clear-felled areas with mature oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Beech, scrub and heath communities have also been included.

On the south-west shore of the lake, large parkland and gardens occur. This area, known as the Grapery, is comprised of a collection of native and introduced species from all over the world including oak, Beech, Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*), Tree of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*), Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* Purpurea Group), Lime (*Tilia* x *europaea*), Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria* agg.) and Yew with a variety of exotic shrubs.

Despite being considerably reduced in size by conifer afforestation, Emo Court is one of the few remaining vestiges of mature climax forest in this region. Abbeyleix Woods is the only other woodland in the county of similar extent and quality.

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