SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DRUMAKEENAN, EAGLE HILL AND PERRY'S MILL

SITE CODE: 000900

This site comprises three separate blocks about 4km north-west of Roscrea, and on the northern bank of the Little Brosna River adjoining the main Roscrea to Birr road. Here the landscape is dominated by the low esker ridges which are depositional relicts of the retreating Pleistocene ice.

The main block is a calcareous esker ridge (cut through by the recently improved main road). Its vegetation is mainly calcareous grassland with spring-flushed slopes running down into herb-rich wet meadows on the Little Brosna banks.

The site is in a remarkably natural condition having been the subject of a history of environmentally sensitive management. An extremely rich calcareous flora is recorded from the grassland including abundant Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) and Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*). It is also very likely that the legally protected Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*) is present.

The extent of this important habitat, often restricted to small hilltop areas, is of note. The wet meadows also include species of note which again reflect calcium enrichment, such as Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*).

Eagle Hill to the north of the main block, is also formed of calcareous glacial till. Unfortunately, the soil surface was bulldozed prior to 1991. On the positive side, this has caused a proliferation of some of the rarest species present here, but it has also instigated an invasion of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). The bulldozed areas still support a rich limestone flora alongside the newly established ruderal species, including the legally protected Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*).

More natural, species-rich grassland exists on the summit; here the occurrence of Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria caerulea*), which is rare this side of the Shannon, is notable. More Nettle-leaved Bellflower is to be found on the north slopes from where woodland has been cleared.

The third area, running north-west away from the Brosna Maltings, is an extremely wet calcareous fen. It has species in common with the wet meadows and flushes between the main Drumakeenan block and the Brosna, but a feature of special interest is the presence of lenses of bog moss (*Sphagnum* spp.), indicating a state of transition from fen to peat bog.

Overall, this is an outstanding site in terms of the extent and quality of its well drained calcareous grasslands (important in European terms) and wet calcareous meadows, the

presence of rare plant species on site (including legally protected species) and in the diversity of habitats on site.

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