SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLINACOR WOOD

SITE CODE: 001749

Ballinacor Wood is situated in the Avonbeg river valley, about 5km west of Rathdrum, in Co. Wicklow. The site, which is contained within the Ballinacor Estate, includes Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) dominated woodland (a habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive), some wet woodland, grassland and streams. The oak woodland forms an extensive canopy from Ballinacor House and covers most of the slopes of Caran. It stretches northwards along the lower north-eastern slopes of Fananierin Mountain.

The Sessile Oak trees are fairly evenly aged - approximately 150-200 years old. The understorey is fairly typical of an oak woodland on thin acid soil and includes Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), the latter often forming a thick carpet on the ground with Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*). Mosses are, in places, abundant on boulders and on the ground. In places, however, the floristic diversity of the understorey is very depauperate due to the presence of a very dense cover of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*).

Closer to the house the woodland is mixed with some fine, large specimens of exotic conifers occurring. At the northern end of the site the woodland gives way to a very open canopy of much older Sessile Oak trees, probably between 200 and 300 years old. These trees have magnificent spreading boughs which support a rich epiphytic flora of lichens, mosses and Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*).

At the periphery of the main oak woodland are patches of wet woodland dominated by willows (*Salix* spp.) and, in places, Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). Further habitat diversity is added by the presence of streams, grassland, and some exposed rocks.

The woodland is managed for game shooting, and Pheasants are reared on the estate. Deer are widespread throughout and are affecting oak regeneration in places. The abundance of Rhododendron has also reduced the quality of the woodland.

Although this site has been damaged by the spread of Rhododendron and by overgrazing by deer, it is still an important example of old oak woodland, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and it contains some fine examples of mature Sessile Oak trees.

25.11.2009