SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ROSS AND GLENNS ESKERS

SITE CODE: 000920

This site is situated about 5km north-north-west of Birr in Co. Offaly. It consists of a gravel esker ridge grading into a cutaway bog of good peat depth.

The esker has been colonised by Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) scrub interspersed with Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and White Willow (*Salix alba*). The ground flora comprises Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Bloody Crane's-bill (*Geranium sanguineum*), Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*), Goat's-beard (*Tragopogon pratensis*) and Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*). Of note on the esker ridge is the presence of uncommon plant species such as Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*) and Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*). The former is mostly confined to the west and central parts of the country.

South of the ridge is old cutaway bog colonised by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), gorse (*Ul*ex spp.) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). In pool areas and wetter sections Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) occur. The latter, although frequent in central Ireland, is rare elsewhere in the country. Further south again is a fine example of a birch (*Betula* spp.) wood with a profuse growth of Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) underneath.

Within the area of cutaway bog the Raft Spider (*Dolomedes fimbriatus*) has been recorded.

Human landuse of the esker is low, the majority of which is substantially ungrazed. Beyond the site boundary, this esker chain has been subject to agricultural and amenity land reclamation and quarrying. These are potential threats to the esker within the site. The cutaway bog is enclosed by eskers and has, therefore, poor drainage. This should limit any further development of the peatland.

The esker ridge supports a good example of a substantially undisturbed Hazel scrub and forms an important ecological example of landscape formation. The adjoining cutaway bog and fine birch woodland add habitat diversity to this site.

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