SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLINASLOE ESKER

SITE CODE: 001779

Ballinasoe Esker is about 6km long and stretches due west from Ballinasloe roughly along the line of the Galway- Dublin rail-line.

The main habitats are mixed wood and dry broadleaved semi-natural woodland. The mixed wood consists of Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) with some Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) and a grove of Yew (*Taxus baccata*).

The dry wood has Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), coppiced Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and some solitary Pedunculate Oaks. There is a good ground flora present with Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) common. Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) are also abundant in places.

A freshwater marsh, wet woodland and a small fen also occur on this site with Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) present in the marsh and woodland and the fen being dominated by sedges (*Carex flacca, C. panicea, C. flava*). Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*) is also present.

Parts of the esker are grazed by cattle which are causing damage due to trampling in places. Also the size of the esker is being reduced due to quarrying and improvement of grassland by fertilising and reseeding.

Continued quarrying is a threat to this site as is the clearing of mature trees. A good ground flora only occurs in undisturbed regions of the woodland and so will be destroyed if woods cleared.

Esker woodlands are scarce in Ireland and undisturbed stands with a good ground flora such as occurs on this site are important links with the original woodland. For these reasons it is important to preserve esker woods and so this should be designated as an NHA.

26.11.2009