SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: KNAPPAGH WOODS

SITE CODE: 001520

A considerable amount of deciduous woodland persists on the eastern flank of Croagh Patrick, County Mayo, and among the jumbled hills and valleys along its north side. These hills are mostly of acid rocks, quartzite and diorite (a type of granite) which have given rise to poor soils. In the last forty years hill grazing pressure has declined sufficiently in the area for the fragmented woodland to spread once more into cleared land and to begin to regenerate again. Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) take part in this colonisation so they are an important feature of the woodland. In the older parts oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) occur with some Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) at the eastern end.

Where the soil is deep enough the ground flora can be quite rich, with ferns (*Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dryopteris affinis*, *D. dilatata*), Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*) and Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) among the higher plants. In the high light conditions of birch wood, Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) is generally dominant with some Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*).

In such an open wood, insect diversity is high especially among flies (Diptera) and butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera). The site supports typical woodland bird species such as Robin, Wren and Blackbird. Willow Warblers use the site in summer.

Much of this woodland is secondary in origin but it has been developing naturally for a number of years and is continuing to expand. The vegetation is at an interesting stage of succession and will continue to change. All woods are susceptible to drastic alteration, felling or replanting with introduced species. However, a second threat, which is eventually as damaging, is grazing which prevents regeneration.

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