SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLINCOLLIG CAVE

SITE CODE: 001249

Ballincollig is a satellite town of Cork City and lies about 5km to the west in the same linear depression, based on limestone. South-west of the town the soils are shallow and the rock breaks through in places. Some of these outcrops are quarried but the highest one is untouched and bears Ballincollig Castle with the cave below. The site consists of this hall and also a lower one, partly quarried, to its south.

The south and east-facing slopes of the castle site are of dry grassland with some bushes of Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) below a cliff. The grassland contains Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*) and Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*) with much Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*). A number of less common species are included, for example Hop Trefoil (*Trifolium campestre*), Common Calamint (*Clinopodium ascendens*) and the Spiked Sedge (*Carex spicata*), as well as the introduced Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*) and Hairy Tare (*Vicia hirsuta*).

Woodland is densest on the north side where Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederae*) and Three-nerved Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*) add interest to the more widespread flora of False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*). Both polypody ferns (*Polypodium australe* and *P. interjectum*) grow widely and cover cliffs and trees in places.

The other sections of the site are a disused quarry where a broad range of 'limestone' plants occurs on the rock surfaces and grassland. Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*), Wall Speedwall (*Veronica arvensis*), Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*), Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*) and Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) are some of these.

The site is relatively species-rich, even for limestone, with some uncommon native and introduced plants. It is also an example of natural habitat in an area of intensive agriculture and also rapid urbanisation. The cave deposits are interesting from a geological viewpoint.

18.11.2009