SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: FORTH MOUNTAIN

SITE CODE: 000761

Forth Mountain is located about 7km west of Wexford. It is a ridge of resistant Cambrian quartzite standing up above the softer slates of the region. Its thin acid soils have been widely used for afforestation and building, and only toward the summit does the natural vegetation prevail. Here the land is covered by heathland. Wet heath occurs on the lower slopes which grades into dry heath on the rockier ground. Both these communities include Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bell Heather (*E. cinerea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Gorse (*U. europaeus*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) become frequent on flatter areas and lichens (*Cladonia* spp.) are also noticeable.

Bird species which have been recorded breeding within the site include Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear, Stonechat, Whitethroat and Linnet.

The Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) occurs widely within the site. Within the site the snail (*Omphiscola glabra*, Order Gastropoda) has been recorded in a small stream on the south west slopes. This is one of the rarest snails in Ireland and is not currently known from any other sites.

A number of butterflies characteristic of heathland have been recorded from the site, notably the Small Heath, Grayling and Wall Brown. The area also attracts the migratory species Red Admiral and Painted Lady.

Parts of the site have already been damaged by afforestation and further planting should be avoided. Overgrazing is another potential threat to the site.

Forth Mountain is of ecological interest since it represents the most south-easterly heathland in the country. This community is not widespread and in many wetter regions has already passed to blanket bog. The site is in easy access to Wexford town and is a recognised amenity with considerable educational value.

12.11.2009