SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: RIVER SWILLY VALLEY WOODS

SITE CODE: 002011

The River Swilly Valley Woods NHA consists of ten separate fragments of woodland one to the north-east of Letterkenny in County Donegal, the other nine in the valley to the west of the town.

Woodland has been planted in this area in the past, but more natural cover has developed also, so that the trees present today are a mixture of natives and exotics. Major native trees are Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) in drier parts, with Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willow (*Salix* spp.) but especially birch (*Betula* spp.) in the wetter areas. Exotic trees include Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). A range of age structures occurs across the site, so that some spaces are more of a scrubby nature - Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) are frequent in these parts.

On the ground, woodland species such as Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), ferns such as Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and various mosses and lichens occur.

Further habitat diversity is provided by a number of heathy areas with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) among the plants to be found there. Rocky streamside ravines provide another habitat as do wet grassland and sites of former Hazel coppice.

Some parts of the site are threatened by overgrazing by domestic stock, while other parts are suffering from vigorous growth of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*). These two threats lower the interest of what is otherwise a valuable refuge in the area for flora and fauna.

8.12.2009