SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYMOON ESKER

SITE CODE: 000797

Ballymoon is located about 3km east of Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow. The site is an esker, a long hill of sand and gravel, which stretches from just south of Dunlecky Cross Roads to Ballymoon Castle. The area included within the site boundary is based on a desk review and only a portion of this site has been the subject of a field survey. The hill's sand deposits show some water-sorting where they are exposed. Sand has been quarried at frequent intervals along the structure of the esker and only the northernmost section, which supports pine trees, is intact.

Calcareous grassland covers much of the esker and at the southern end contains several rare plant species, two of which are legally protected under the Flora Protection Order (1987), namely Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*) and Basil Thyme (*Acinos arvensis*).

Basil Thyme is typically associated with eskers and calcareous soils. Since 1970 the species has only been seen at four sites and is apparently declining as a result of modern methods of weed control and exploitation of its esker habitat for gravel extraction.

Green-winged Orchid is typical of unimproved meadow pasture and sandhills. This species has suffered a dramatic decline in numbers and only seven sites have been reported since 1970. The reasons for this decline are apparently due to land reclamation and especially fertilising of the old pasture sites in which it occurred.

In addition, the scarce Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) occurs. Other species included in the grassland are Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) and Spring-sedge (*C. caryophyllea*).

This site is also of geomorphological interest as part of an esker well separated from the larger esker systems of the midlands, a rare phenomenon in the county.

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