SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DOON ESKER WOOD

SITE CODE: 001830

Doon Esker Wood is a long narrow strip of semi-natural woodland along the crest of a steep-sided esker ridge 8km east of Clonmacnoise, Co Offaly. It consists of a canopy of Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) with abundant Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Many young trees and some seedlings of Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Yew (*Taxus baccata*) occur as under-shrubs. The ground flora is very diverse and contains the scarce species Pale Sedge (*Carex pallescens*) and Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) as well as abundant Wood-sedge (*Carex sylvatica*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*) and many others.

The large area surrounding this narrow strip is under coniferous plantation (about 30 years old) and the semi-natural woodland represents the re-growth of native trees and Beech on the thin soils of the crest of the ridge after almost complete failure of the planted conifers there. The boundary of Doon Esker Wood is taken at the base of the steep esker slopes, including at present quite a large area of conifers. Careful management after the harvesting of these trees could restore semi-natural woodland with a diverse ground flora to the whole ridge. In this respect the Beech, which is not native to Ireland, needs to be eliminated.

Semi-natural woodland on esker ridges is not at all common in the region, where most are reclaimed grassland or are quarried. Although this woodland is only 30 year old regeneration, the ground flora contains many features of the original ancient woodland. This ridge gains even more importance because it is part of the 'Eiscir Riada', the ancient routeway across Ireland to Clonmacnoise and beyond. The ecological importance and the historical importance greatly complement each other in Doon Esker Wood.

26.11.2009