SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYCORE RATH

SITE CODE: 001751

Ballycore Rath is located about 10km north-west of Baltinglass. The site is a steep-sided body of moraine, which was deposited during the last glaciation. It is crowned by a rath which commands fine views to the west and south-west over Co. Kildare. The southern side of the site is bounded by the Bolhoge River.

The vegetation of the slopes of the moraine is rich in species, many of which are typical of a calcicole (alkaline) substrate. It is dominated by grasses which include Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*). Among the other plants are Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*), Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Cowslip (*Primula veris*). Other plants indicative of base-rich conditions are Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and the scarce Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*).

There are many rabbit burrows on the slopes of the moraine.

Additional habitats on the site include a small wooded area on the southern slopes. This is dominated by Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), with a diverse shrub layer of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). The ground flora is variable and poached in places, but includes Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*).

There is a small plantation of mature European Larch (*Larix decidua*) on the northern slopes. This has a very open canopy with a grass dominated ground flora. There is an area of marsh adjacent to the river which is rich in sedges (*Carex* spp.), rushes (*Juncus* spp.) and other species including Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*).

This site is important as a good example of calcicole grassland, rich in many of the species that typically occur in such situations. The presence of the woodland, river and marsh adds to the diversity of the site.

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