SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: COURTOWN DUNES AND GLEN

SITE CODE: 000757

This site is situated immediately north of Courtown. It consists mostly of mixed woodland along the Owenavarragh River and a dune ridge which is largely wooded.

The Glen has probably been wooded for a long period and south of the river consists of a mixture of native and introduced deciduous trees, with some under-planting by conifers. Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) are the dominant species, with Oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) common in places. A stand of mature Poplar (*Populus* spp.) occurs along the river. The shrub layer is fairly sparse and mainly of Sycamore, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Elder (*Sambucus nigra*). The ground flora is diverse and often luxuriant due to absence of grazing. Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), Bluebells (*Endymion non-scripta*) and Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*) are locally abundant. Other herb species present include Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) and Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*). The fern, bryophyte and lichen floras are particularly well-developed.

On the north side of the river there are conifer plantations dominated by Larch (*Larix decidua*). However, the canopy is not dense and there is a good ground cover.

The rare sedge *Carex strigosa* was recorded in abundance in 1993 and this is the only known Wexford site. A large population of the uncommon Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*), likewise in its only known Wexford site, also occurs.

The dune ridge is dominated by mixed woodland and scrub of Sycamore and Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*). The ground flora is reasonably well developed beneath the trees. There are a few open patches of dune grassland, where such species as Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Common Storks-bill (*Erodium circutarium*) occur. A narrow foredune ridge merges into a fine sandy beach.

The Owenavarragh River adds habitat diversity to the site. The section leading to Courtown Habour is canalized. Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) occur near the sea, while willow (*Salix* spp.) is common along the banks.

This site provides good examples of woodland and coastal habitats in close proximity. The mixed woods support a wide selection of plants including two rare plants found nowhere else in Wexford.

8.4.2009