SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CARNDONAGH WOOD

SITE CODE: 001098

Carndonagh Wood is situated on the eastern slopes of a small hill, namely Crocknakoliaderry, 1km west of Carndonagh Town in the north of the Inishowen Peninsula, County Donegal. The underlying bedrock is quartzite with a covering of peat, deeper at the base of the hill. This small (13ha) native woodland site is also near to the borders of the North Inishowen Coast NHA (002012) at Trawbreaga Bay, to the north of Carndonagh.

The habitats most frequently encountered on the site include broadleaved semi-natural woodland, scrub woodland and heath. The dominant tree species in the wood are Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with an understorey of Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). The ground flora species composition varies throughout the wood, depending to some extent, on the intensity of grazing, principally by sheep. In some parts the ground flora is luxuriant with much Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillis*) and Bryophytes e.g. *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and *Thuidium tamariscinum*, also Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*). The ground flora of more heavily grazed areas tends to be less species-rich, with a sparse covering of grasses such as Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and mosses.

Scrub woodland borders the older, established woodland area and here Downy Birch, willow (*Salix* spp.) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) are commonly found. The ground flora of the scrub on the eastern edge of the used wood comprises heathland species such as Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*). In contrast, the wetter areas on the northern edge support the growth of Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.).

The boundaries of the site have been extended to include areas of heathland, both above and below the original hillside woodland. The heathland below the wood is on deeper peat. This area has, in former times, been used for turbary but is now revegetated, mainly with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Purple Moor-grass and cottongrass (*Eriophorum* spp.). Heathland above the wood is also Heather dominated with Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bog-myrtle. Within both these heathland areas, tree species from the established woodland are regenerating naturally.

The Carndonagh Wood could be used, sensitively, as a valuable environmental education resource for local schools, to study, for example, woodland development and succession, as well as, the effects of grazing livestock in natural habitats. The only strong threat to the woodland's survival would appear to be grazing pressure, particularly overgrazing by sheep, decreasing the ground flora species diversity and cover.

This woodland is considered, and recommended, for designation as a NHA of regional importance. It is a wood of native species, with a diverse ground flora and a habitat scarce within the Inishowen area of Donegal. The tree canopy and surrounding scrub provides shelter and nesting sites for birds, adding further to the site's biological diversity. The extension of the site's boundaries also adds to the site's habitat diversity and will hopefully enable the wood to expand through natural regeneration.

17.11.2009