

Site Name: Ballyarr Wood SAC

Site Code: 000116

On the eastern flank of a low ridge of hills, 11 km north of Letterkenny and 5 km west of Ramelton in Co. Donegal, the Ballyarr Woods form one of the best and largest examples of a semi-natural deciduous woodland in the north-west of Ireland. These woods have a good diversity of species, and as well as containing old oak woodland, they include open heath areas, scrub and wet grassland. There are also areas of old coppices and old field systems.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[91A0] Old Oak Woodlands

The canopy of the woodland is formed of fine, mature Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) with occasional Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). There is also a well-developed understorey of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and a rich ground flora. There is a well-defined gradation from the deeper soils which are dominated by Hazel, to shallower soils on the tops of ridges which are typified by scrub.

In the more open area on the north-east side, the woodland has responded well to recent management practices such as the exclusion of grazing livestock, and young tree regeneration is occurring. Stands of birch (*Betula* sp.) are common, along with willow (*Salix* spp.), Rowan, Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Patches of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), heathers (*Erica* spp.) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) are also common.

One of the most important aspects of the woodland ecology is that Oak is regenerating in the form of seedlings and saplings. Seedlings of Rowan, Holly and Hazel are also present. Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is also regenerating freely in the well-established drier parts of the wood.

Ballyarr Woods, which is also designated as a Nature Reserve and owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, is one of the few remaining native Oak woods in Donegal, and one of only a relatively small number throughout the country. This contributes significantly to its overall scientific and conservation value.