

Site Name: Pollnacknockaun Wood Nature Reserve SAC

Site Code: 000319

Pollnacknockaun Wood is situated approximately 2 km north-east of Woodford, Co. Galway. It is a large area of former oakwood with significant remnants of the original stands of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and even larger areas of intact ground flora. The area is underlain by Old Red Sandstone, which is covered in places by drift. The soils vary from thin acidic podzols to deeper gleyed brown earths. In the 1930s and 1940s the area at Pollnacknockaun was cleared of hardwoods and planted with commercial conifers, mainly Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). Most of these conifers have now been removed and woodland regeneration is occurring. Invasion by Beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*) and Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) is now a threat.

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

At Pollnacknockaun Wood, due to the relatively fertile nature of the soil, the size and quality of the hardwood and the diversity of the ground flora is greater than in many other Irish oakwoods. The dominant ground flora consists of Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Wood-sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are present and sometimes locally abundant in the understorey. The canopy consists of tall Sessile Oak with occasional Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Two less common shrubs, Spindle (*Euonymus europeaus*) and Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*), also occur.

The site boundary has been taken to include all of the Nature Reserve plus an adjacent, similar sized area owned by Coillte. Here, Scots Pine planting in the past has allowed the ground flora to survive. Management of this section should follow that of the State-owned section. Also included is a tongue of woodland to the east which consists of a good stand of Oak with an understorey of Yew and Holly.

A stream which passes through the Nature Reserve is also included in the site. Rough Horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*), a species which is rare in the west of Ireland, is found on the stream-bank. The stream feeds an area of wet Alder/Birch woodland, which supports a very diverse ground flora dominated by Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and a buckler fern (*Dryopteris* sp.). An adjacent

area of wet grassland has Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and locally abundant bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.).

A varied bird community, including the Jay, is present in the wood, and Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*) graze part of the site.

Old Oak Woodlands are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Oakwoods are rare in Ireland and oakwoods on rich soils which are not the result of planting are even rarer. The remnants of original oakwood in Pollnaknockaun are part of what was, until 1940, one of the largest areas of natural oakwood in Ireland.

Pollnaknockaun Wood represents an opportunity to recreate an oakwood with its associated fauna and a diverse ground flora. The wet woodland, stream and wet grassland add further interest to this site.