

Site Name: Oldhead Wood SAC

Site Code: 000532

Oldhead Wood is situated on the sheltered eastern slopes of two low hills, 2 km north-east of Louisburgh on the southern shore of Clew Bay, Co. Mayo. The area is underlain by a complex geology of igneous rocks, mainly Silurian, felstone and dolerite, overlain by loamy brown earths merging into peaty podzols on the hill tops. The site contains old oak woodland and dry heath, and most of the woodland on the site was designated as a Nature Reserve in 1984.

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):

[4030] Dry Heath [91A0] Old Oak Woodlands

The woodland is dominated by Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), but Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) predominates in some areas. Associated tree species are Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*). Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Irish Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*) are present as understorey species. Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) has been introduced in a number of areas.

Epiphytes are abundant in the woodland and include such species as Lungwort (*Lobaria pulmonaria*) and *Usnea subfloridana*. These occur in large hanging patches, sometimes embedded in mosses (e.g. *Isoetecium* spp. and *Hypnum* spp.), and they have been recorded as measuring up to 60 cm in diameter. The rare Myxomycete fungus, *Trichia lutescens*, has been recorded from woodland in the site.

Much of the woodland ground flora is characterised by a thick carpet of Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), with Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Wood-sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) as associated species.

The wood has an abundance of nesting birds such as Long-tailed Tit, Spotted Flycatcher and Chiffchaff. Nightjar and Redstart have also been recorded here. Some areas of the site had been planted with exotic conifers, particularly Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), but stands of conifers have been felled and removed recently.

The areas of heath within the site support a suite of typical heath species, the dominants being Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), heather species (*Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica*

cinerea, *E. tetralix*) or Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). The nationally scarce St. Dabeoc's Heath (*Daboecia cantabrica*) occurs in some areas. Several small flushes are found within the site and these support a good diversity of plant species.

Oldhead Wood represents an extreme development of Atlantic oakwood, and is one of the only Irish sites where this habitat occurs directly adjacent to the coast. The luxuriance of the lower plants, particularly the lichens, is significant. The removal of conifers from areas of the site should allow regeneration of native woodland tree species. The site is of additional importance for the presence of dry heath, though parts of this are being over-grazed.