

Site Name: Union Wood SAC

Site Code: 000638

Union Wood is located on the eastern bank of the Ballysadare River between Ballysadare and Collooney in Co. Sligo. The site contains old oak woodland which is typical of western Oak wood (Blechno-Quercetum) and one of the best remaining in the region.

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

Part of Union Wood consists of fairly pure, open woodland dominated by Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), and with some Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) also occur. The soils of the area are acidic and the ground flora is typical of an acidic wood. Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) is abundant, but Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) are present too. Epiphytes are well developed with polypody fern (*Polypodium vulgare* agg.) and numerous lichens occurring.

The presence of an area of heath at Union Rock adds diversity to the site. This hilltop section is dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and has a well developed moss cover (*Sphagnum* spp. and *Hypnum cupressiforme*).

The wood supports a diverse fauna, including Pine Marten (*Martes martes*) and Badger (*Meles meles*), both Red Data Book species, and also Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Reported poor regeneration within the woodland may be due to grazing by a herd of Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*) which frequent the site. Raven, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk also occur. Two rare flies (Order Diptera) have also been recorded from this area: *Chrysogaster virescens* and *Xylophagus ater*.

The conservation significance of the site is reduced by the inter- and under-planting of stands of commercial conifers. Naturalised alien species, such as Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), also occur in places. Of further concern is the presence of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), which will continue to spread if not controlled. As noted above, deer grazing may be impacting on tree regeneration.

Despite damage from introduced exotic species, Union Wood is an important Oak woodland and one of the largest remaining Oak woodlands in the region.