

Site Name: Glen of the Downs SAC

Site Code: 000719

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

Glen of the Downs is a semi-natural oak wood situated within an impressive glacial overflow channel. It is located on the Dublin-Wexford road, about 7 km south of Bray, Co. Wicklow. The underlying rock is mostly quartzite and it outcrops in a few places. The soil is a sandy loam, brown earth to brown podzolic, and is very dry over much of the site. Most of the site has been a Nature Reserve since 1980.

Much of the site comprises Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) woodland referable to the Blechno-Quercetum petraeae association. Sessile Oak is especially dominant on the mid to upper slopes. The quality of the Oak-dominated areas is variable - the association is well developed and especially pure on the western side, while in some places it occurs as coppice scrub. The shrub layer is sparse, but Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is locally common. On the ground, Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) forms a dense carpet over much of the area, with other species such as Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) occurring occasionally. Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) and ferns such as Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) are abundant in places, especially on the south-western slopes.

The site includes some areas of mixed woodland, in which Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and other non-native species occur. Bryophytes are notably scarce within the valley and may reflect the dryness of the site. However, some rare species have been recorded. The site is notable for the presence of the rare bryophytes *Cephaloziella turneri*, *Pterigynandrum filiforme* and *Plagiothecium curvifolium*, the last named in its only Irish site. There are also several rare or scarce Myxomycete fungi, namely *Echinostelium colliculosum*, *Licea marginata*, *L. perexigua*, *Perichaena vermicularis*, *Comatricha ellae* (only known Irish site), *Diderma chondrioderma* and *Didymium crustaceum*.

A narrow band of alluvium associated with a small stream occurs on the valley floor. Here, the woodland is dominated by Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), with a species-rich herb layer that includes Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

Glen of the Downs is notable for some rare invertebrates, including *Mycetobia obscura* (Order Diptera) which is found in only one other locality in Britain and Ireland.

A breeding bird census carried out in 1990 recorded a total of 21 species holding territory. Wren, Robin, Blue Tit, Chaffinch and Great Tit were the most abundant species. Blackcap and Jay also breed, and the rare Wood Warbler has been recorded. Grey Wagtail breeds along the stream.

Although exploited heavily in the past, this woodland is well developed, rich in species and is of high conservation significance. The site supports oak woodland of a type that is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The glacial overflow channel is the largest example of such a feature in the country.