

Site Name: Castletownshend SAC

Site Code: 001547

Castletownshend wood, which is situated 7 km east of Skibbereen in Co. Cork, lies on the west side of a narrow sea inlet cut into an undulating ridge of Old Red Sandstone. The soil is thin and the slopes of the site are generally covered by oak woodland, particularly on the steeper slopes around The Narrows.

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):

[1421] Killarney Fern (<i>Trichomanes speciosum</i>)
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The woodland at the site consists of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) with some Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), and with Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) as the understorey. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) also occur, and there are a few specimens of Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and occasional conifers. Such a woodland structure shows a long history of human influence, which is further emphasised by the presence of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), shrubs which are extensively naturalised and actively spreading within the site.

Where Rhododendron occurs, the ground flora of the woodland is sparse, but elsewhere ferns (including *Dryopteris affinis*, *D. aemula*, *Athyrium filix-femina* and *Blechnum spicant*), Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) are present, and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and Ivy (*Hedera helix*) scramble in the trees overhead. At one place the Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*) occurs as a small colony. This is a legally protected plant (Flora (Protection) Order, 1999), which is rare elsewhere in Cork. It is also rare throughout Europe and is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is a south-western 'Atlantic' plant whose Irish populations were much reduced through collecting in the 1900s.

Some of the site has been planted with conifers, but the steeper slopes retain a cover of semi-natural broadleaf woodland. Castletownshend is particularly noteworthy for the presence of the rare and protected Killarney Fern.