

Native Woodland Conservation in Ireland

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Service

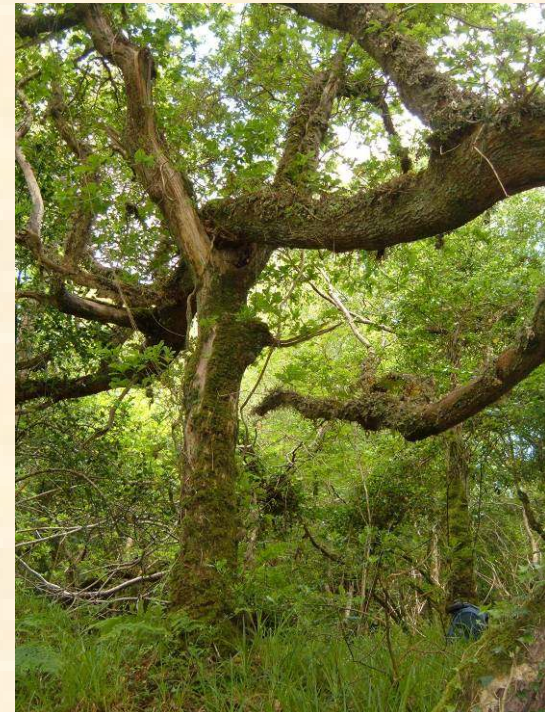


Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



Native woodland resource

- c.130,000 ha native woodland
- These represent remnants of former forests, old plantations, old natural regeneration and recent expansion (natural and planted)
- 4 main woodland types:
 - Oak on acidic substrates
 - Ash/hazel on calcareous /nutrient-rich substrates
 - Alder on wet soils
 - Birch mostly on peats



Native woodland resource

- Minor woodland types include
 - Willow on wet soils
 - Yew on limestone outcrops



Native woodland resource

1. Highest expression of natural vegetation with greatest amount of biodiversity
2. Some may be remnants of original forests – greatly modified
3. European importance
 - Important habitats
 - Important populations of some species

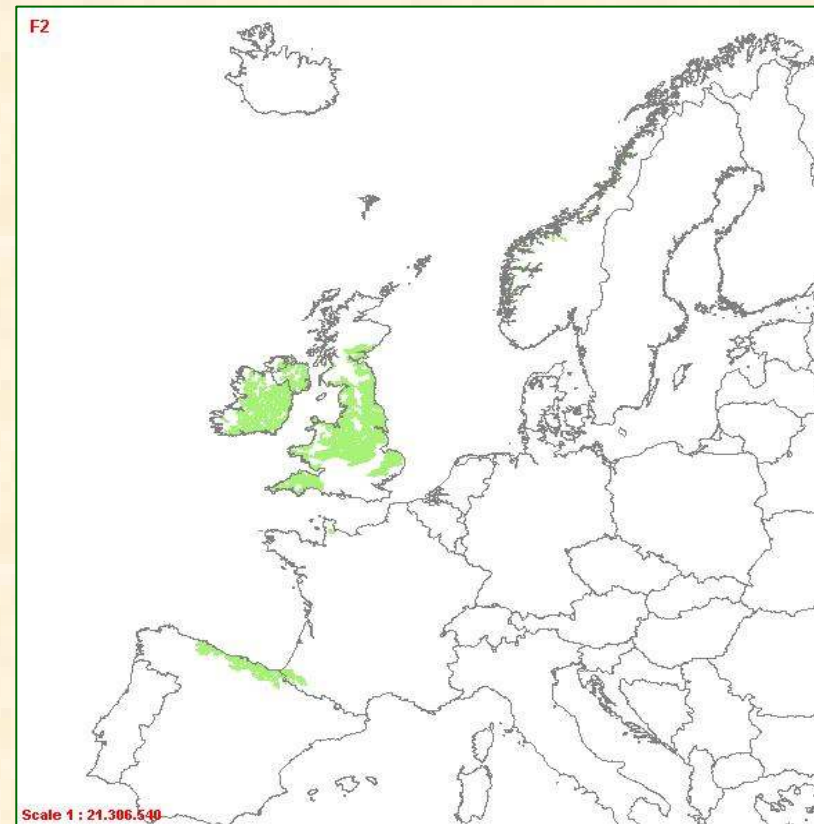


European distribution of a) Bryophyte/lichen-rich oak woods b) Ash woods

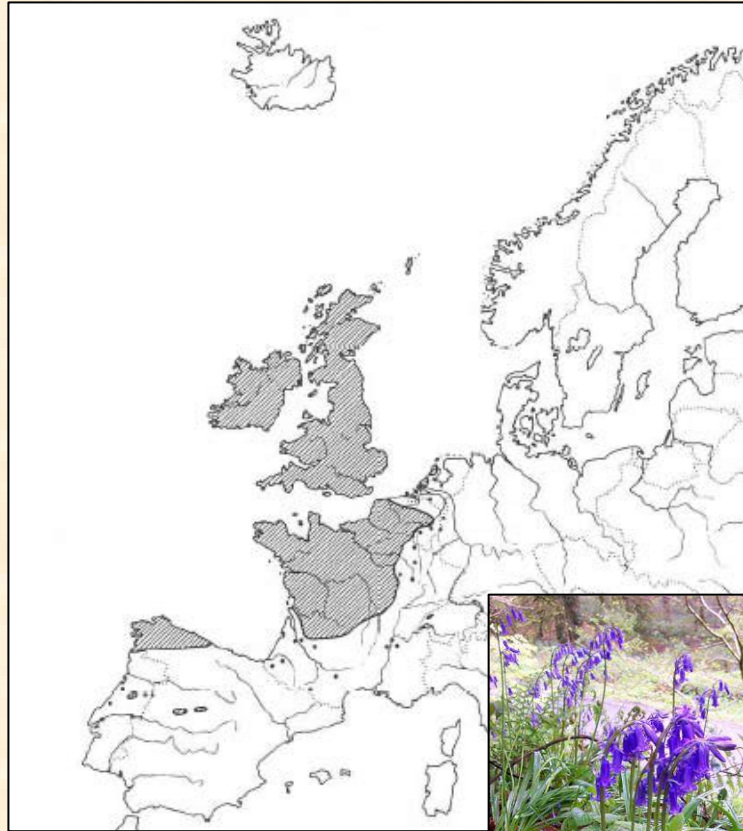
a



b



European distribution of two Atlantic species



Bluebell
(*Hyacinthoides
non-scripta*)



Hay-scented
buckler fern
(*Dryopteris
aemula*).



History of woodland conservation

- ECY 1970. Start of woodland management /research in Killarney National Park
- Surveys of native woodlands in State ownership 1970s
- 1976 Enactment of Wildlife Act
- First Nature Reserves designated 1980s
- Expansion of National Park network 1970s/80s

History of woodland conservation

- By 1990 c.4,500 ha of woodland protected in 32 nature reserves and 1,700ha within National Parks
 - 1990s EU Habitats Directive:
 - Annex 1 habitats:
 - Oak woodlands with holly and hard fern
 - Yew woodlands
 - Alluvial woodlands
 - Bog (birch) woodlands
- NB** Ash woodlands not included but hazel/ash woodland on Limestone pavement are designated



History of woodland conservation

- >10,000ha woodland within SACs
- Assessment of conservation status of SACs - 'bad' or 'inadequate'
- National survey of native woodlands provides large database



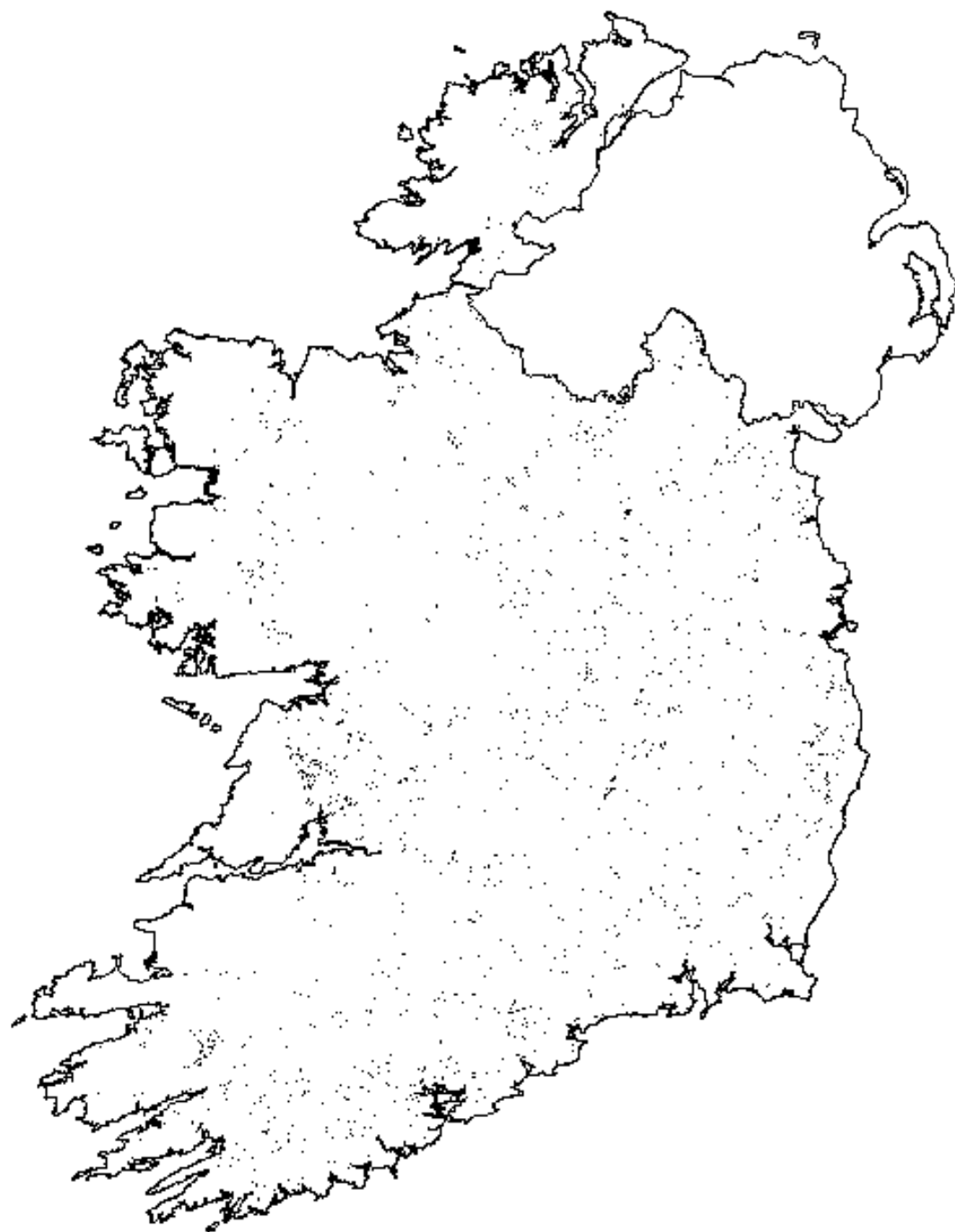
Conservation challenges

Why did our woodlands score badly?

Physical

- Small total area - c.2% of land area
- Small stand size. 50% of sites < 6ha.
3.3% > 50ha
- Fragmentation
- Large 'edge effect'
- Clearance





Conservation challenges

Why did our woodlands score badly?

Biological

- Invasive plant species, e.g. Rhododendron (25% of sites), dogwood, sycamore
- Inappropriate grazing (severe at 9% of sites)
- Inter- and underplanting with conifers
- Inter- and underplanting with non-native broadleaves, e.g. beech, sycamore
- Inappropriate management – clear-felling/neglect
- Absence of dead wood



Conservation Management Requirements

Physical

- Increase area and stand size. Reduce fragmentation and edge effects
 - Promote planting, e.g. Native Woodland Scheme, REPS, Millennium Project. (Land abandonment.)
- Reduce impact of infrastructural and other developments
 - EIAs, Local Authorities,
 - NRA, etc.



Conservation Management Requirements

- Consider landscape approach
- 30% cover of woodland within landscape is a significant threshold
- Core Forest Area
- 25ha minimum size recommended for managed woods to maximise habitat diversity
- Include open areas of grassland, heath, marsh



Conservation Management Requirements

Biological

- Removal of invasive alien plants
- Removal of inter- and under-planted conifers and non-native broadleaves.
- Control of grazing
 - Experimental plots



Conservation Management Requirements

- Appropriate management, e.g. coupes, coppicing
- Creation of dead wood, e.g. ring-barking, fell to waste

NB. Timber production and conservation are not mutually exclusive



Achievements

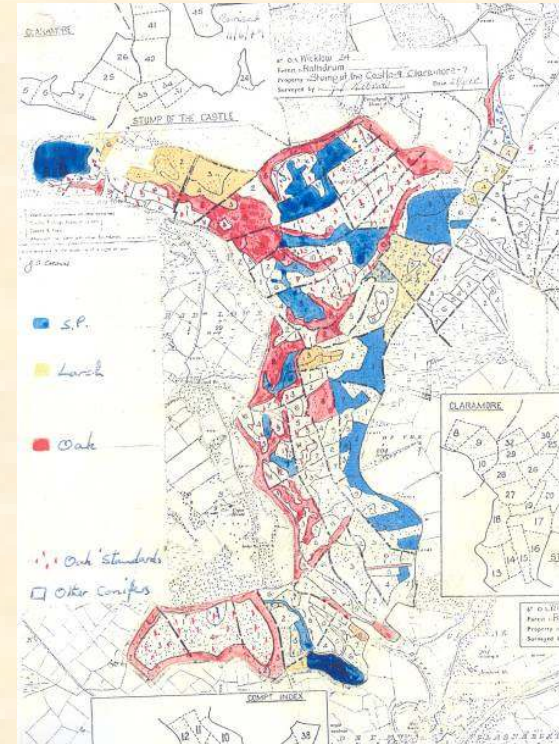
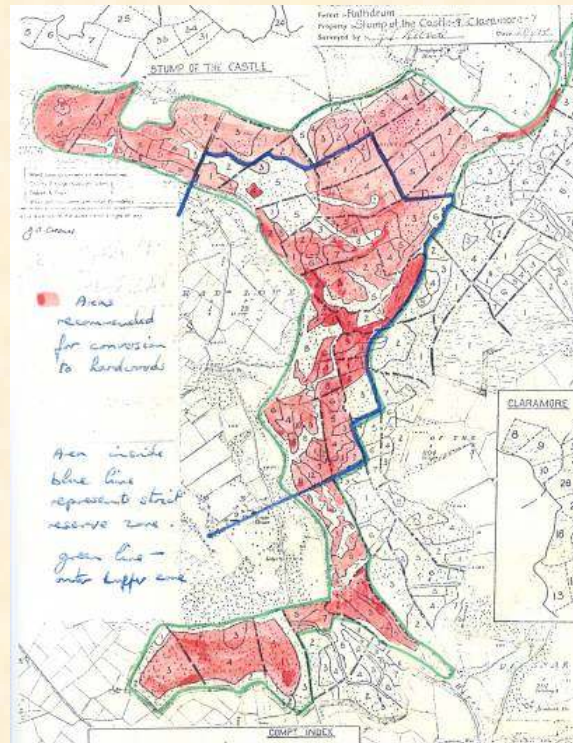
- Woodlands of Ireland – promotes native woodland
- Native Woodland Scheme >5,000ha (4427ha element 1, 518ha element 2)
- Millennium Project 607ha
- CoillteLIFE Project 550ha
- c.6,200ha of nature reserves/national parks have been managed for conservation
 - E.g. Vale of Clara
 - Killarney National Park and Glengarriff Nature Reserve



Achievements

Vale of Clara

- Removal of conifers
- Reducing fragmentation



Achievements

Killarney National Park. c.1300 ha of Rhododendron cleared. Extensive area in Glengarriff.



Conclusions

- Over last 40 years there has been a major change in attitudes to native woodlands
- Their importance and value is now recognised
- Considerable success in restoring stands
 - Conservation assessments – next reporting will be more positive
- Designation of Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) will be next step
- Control of Rhododendron still a major challenge
- Deer an increasing problem



Thank you for your attention

