

# Native Woodland Conservation in Ireland

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Comhshaol, Oidhreachta 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

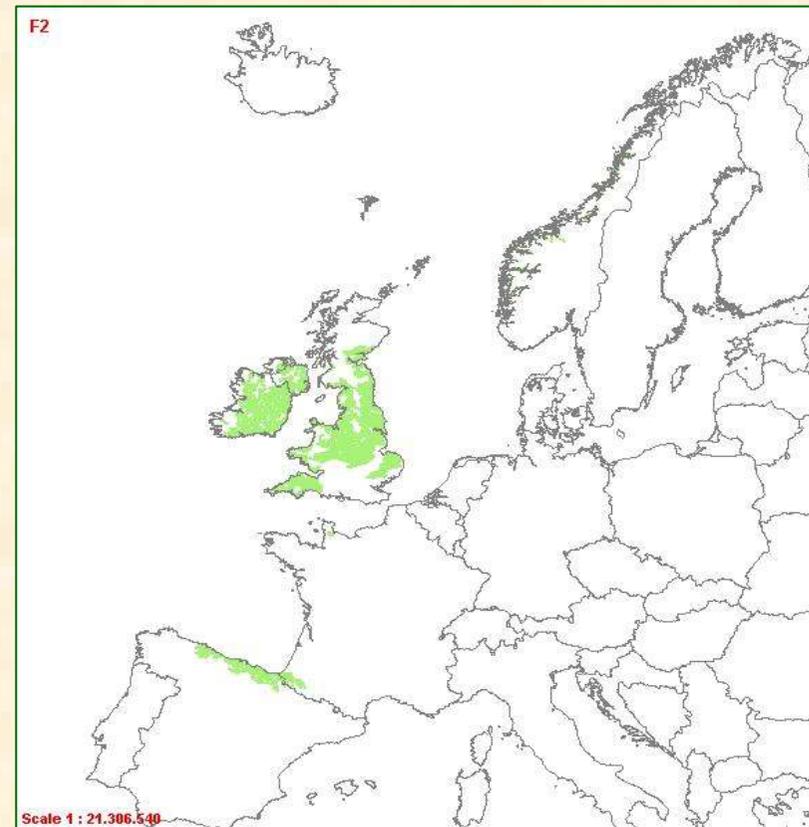


# European distribution of a) Bryophyte/lichen-rich oak woods b) Ash woods

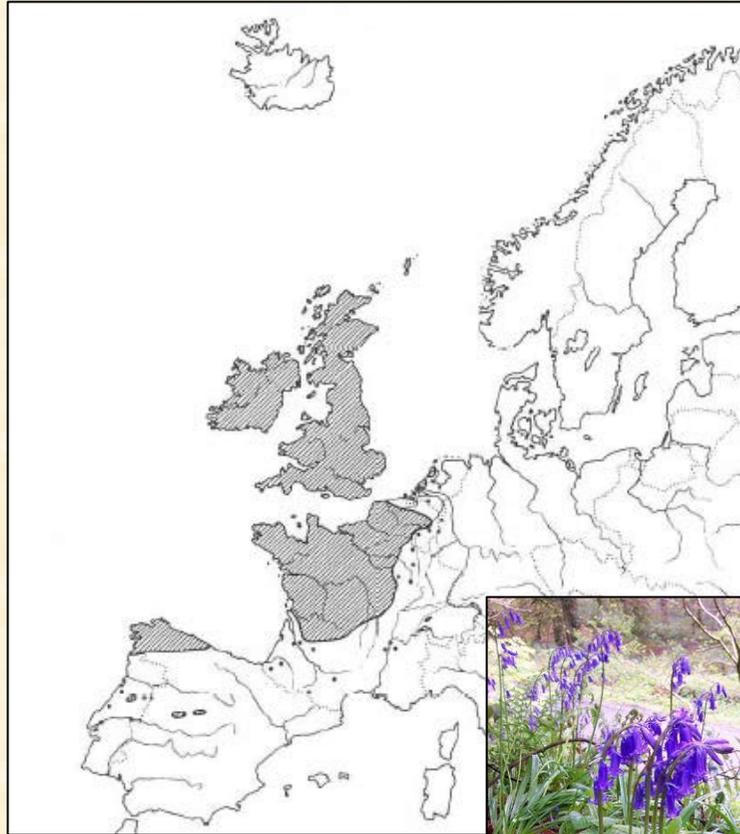
a



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



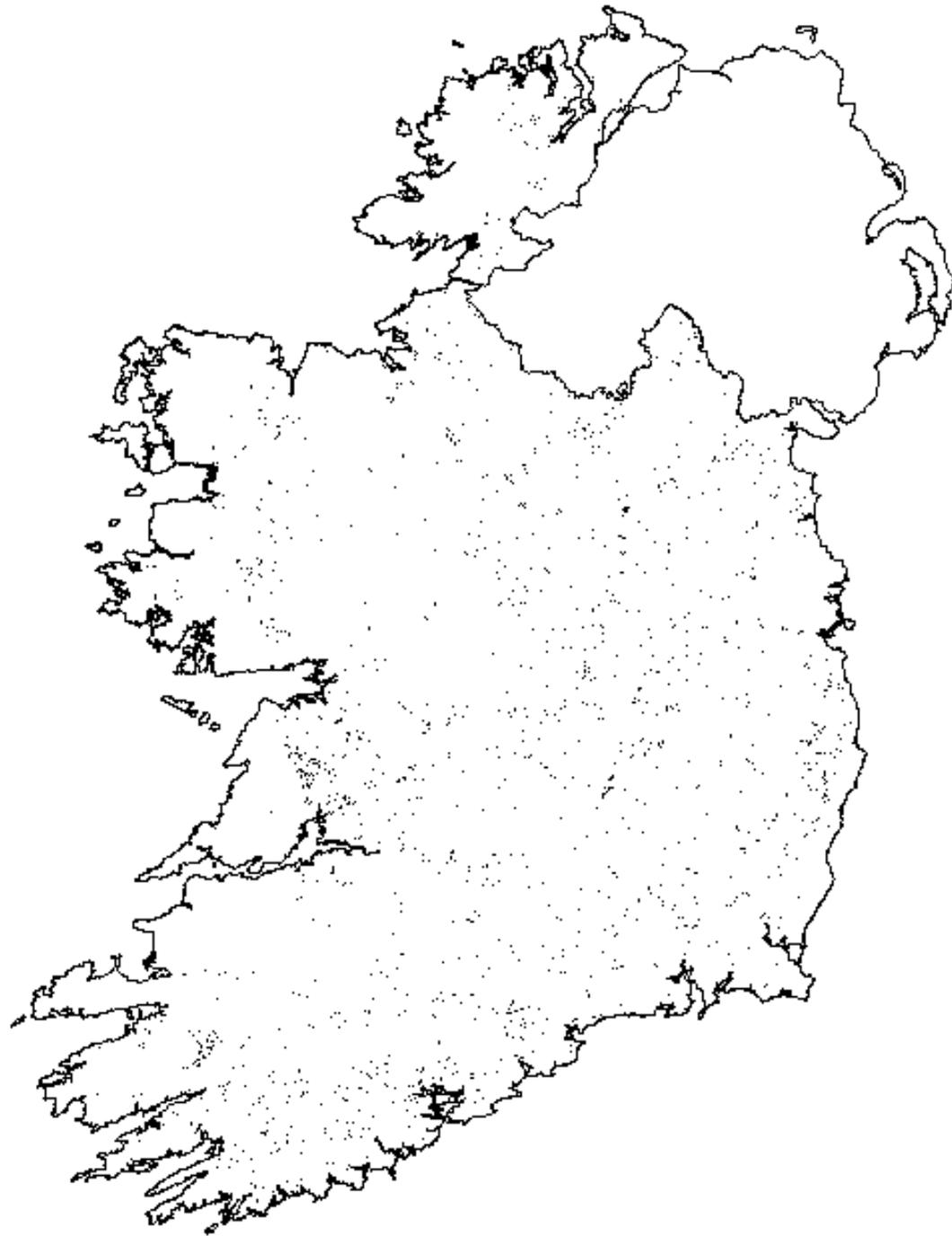
# Conservation challenges

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

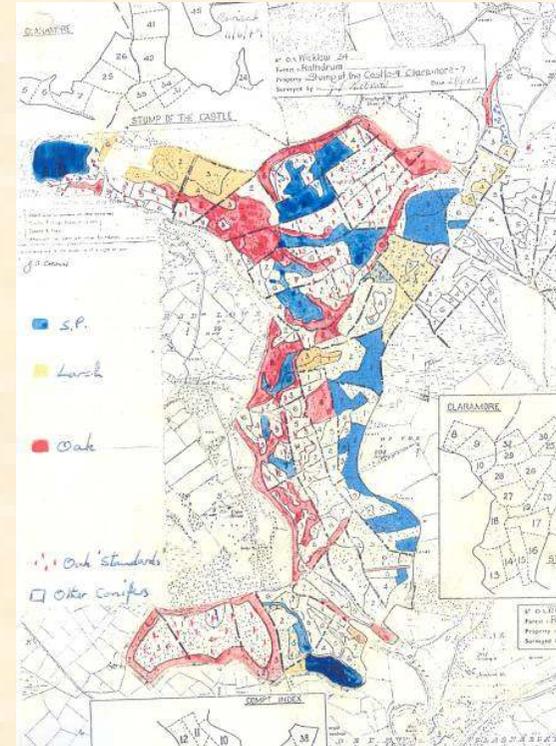
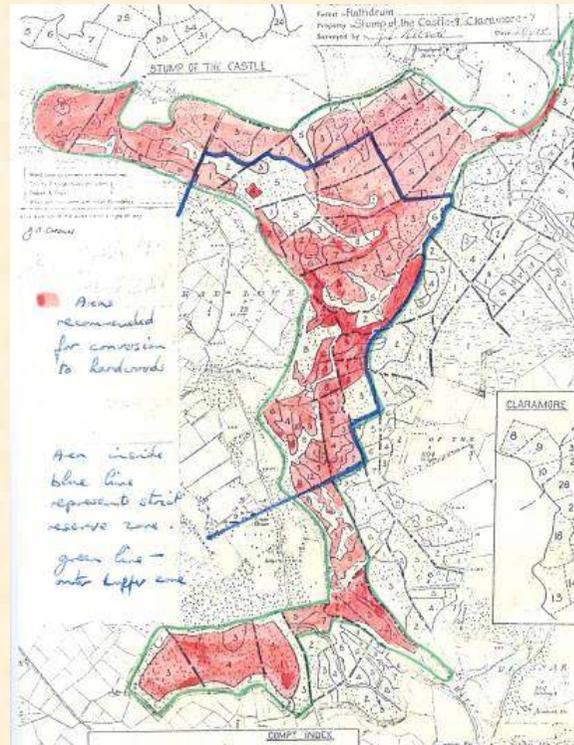
- Woodlands of Ireland – promotes native woodland
- Native Woodland Scheme >5,000ha (4427ha element 1, 518ha element 2)
- Millennium Project 607ha
- CoillteLIFE Project 550ha
- c.6,200ha of nature reserves/national parks have been managed for conservation
  - E.g. Vale of Clara
  - Killarney National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

