

Mixed Ashwood

This type of native woodland grows on “base-rich” soils. These soils are generally alkaline, naturally fertile and productive. Their rich and varied ground flora occurs because of this soil fertility and because the canopy doesn’t cast a dense shade.

Mixed ashwoods are generally distributed in the north and west of Britain and Ireland. In Northern Ireland they occur mainly on the basalt of County Antrim and limestone of County Fermanagh with small pockets in County Armagh, County Down and the Sperrins.

The main two tree species in mixed ashwood are ash, as expected, (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*), which can often be dominant.



History

Ash arrived in Ireland about 8,500 years ago. It wasn’t a particularly common tree at that time and was probably confined to dry, limestone soils.

Following the Europe-wide demise of the elm (*Ulmus glabra*) about 5,900 years ago, the ash began to gain a foothold as more light reached the woodland floor.

Mixed ashwoods are normally unmanaged but are often used as areas for grazing and shelter by livestock. Coppicing in Northern Ireland historically is not widely understood but, in the past, some woods will have been coppiced on an *ad-hoc* basis.

The extent of this habitat across Northern Ireland is estimated to be at least 3,430ha.

To be defined as priority habitat a woodland must be greater than 0.5ha in area, have 20% or more canopy cover (or the potential for 20% canopy cover) and this canopy must consist of 50% or more site-native trees or shrubs. It should have typical woodland ground flora.



Supported Species

Mixed ashwoods consist of ash, downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) and hazel. Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and goat willow (*Salix caprea*) are also found, as well as the non-native, invasive species sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Many other lichens, mosses, fungi, birds, mammals and invertebrates are supported by this type of woodland.

Typical plants include bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*).

Threats to Mixed Ashwood

Many factors are used as indicators to show the condition of mixed ashwoods, but relatively little is known about the condition of mixed ashwoods in Northern Ireland. Current threats include:

- Invasive species growing in the woodlands and replacing native trees
- Grazing, browsing and bark stripping by animals preventing natural regeneration
- Dumping of waste and building rubble
- Deforestation for agricultural use and development
- A lack of management or the accumulation of nutrients from agriculture, game bird rearing and spray drift



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