

## Coniferous Woodland



Coniferous trees are those that produce cones such as fir, pine and spruce trees. They are usually evergreen, with needles instead of the broad leaves of deciduous trees. Within the Park there are areas of coniferous woodland as well as mixed woodland where you will find both coniferous and deciduous trees.

### Coronation Plantation

Coronation Plantation, near to the Sally Gap, is one such area and is dominated by Scots Pine. It stretches for 2km along the Liffey Valley, near Kippure Mountain. Scots Pine was originally a native tree in Ireland but it died out around 2000 years ago. In Wicklow, it was reintroduced in the 19th century. Coronation Plantation near the Sally Gap was named in celebration of the coronation of King William IV in 1831. Scots Pine forests have quite an open canopy allowing light into the valley floor, therefore, a Scots Pine forest tends to be more diverse than other coniferous plantations. In Coronation, the Scots Pine is interspersed with Sessile Oak trees. Like the Sessile Oak, it prefers acidic soils. The ground layer is dominated by Ling, Bilberry and Purple Moor-grass. From autumn onwards, as the Purple Moor-grass turns colour, the evergreen Scots Pine trees in Coronation contrasts sharply to the bleached grass. The Scots Pine forest is an important habitat for our native Red Squirrel, which feeds on its cones and lives high up in the trees. So it is important for the Park to conserve areas of Scots Pine in order to help the Red Squirrel to survive in Wicklow.

### Miners' Road, Glendalough

Another area of mixed coniferous forest within the Park is along the Miners' Road by the Upper Lake in Glendalough and on the slopes of Camaderry Mountain. These are mainly Scots Pine and European Larch trees. The Larch is an unusual conifer in that it is deciduous and disposes of its soft

needles before the frosts of winter can damage them. It is not known when it was introduced to Ireland, but it came to Britain around 1629 and it originally comes from the Central European Mountains. As the Larch loses its needles in the winter, light can get to the forest floor, allowing a greater diversity of plants to develop than in a complete evergreen forest. The trees along the Miners' Road were planted in the mid-1800s to provide timber for the mining activities in the area. The mines closed in 1889 and therefore the trees were never used. They are now mature and provide an important habitat for Red Squirrels and Long-eared Owls. Along the Miners' Road, you will perhaps notice a large nest-like structure on a Scots Pine tree. This is caused by Pine Nest Fungus. The tree reacts to the parasite by producing clusters of small branches, similar to the Birch's witch's broom.

### **Commercial Forestry**

Large-scale commercial forestry was planted in County Wicklow from the 1920's onwards. Sitka Spruce, a non-native conifer, was the most commonly planted tree. Originally from North America, it thrives on Ireland's acidic upland soils. Compared to deciduous woodlands, conifer plantations are poor in ground flora. This is due to a number of reasons. The trees tend to be planted at the same time and once the canopy forms, very little light reaches the forest floor. As the trees are evergreen, they do not lose their leaves in the winter, this ensures that the floor of the forest is in constant darkness. The pine needles from the conifers do not decompose as easily as the leaves of deciduous trees, therefore, making the ground below them more acidic and inhibiting the growth of other species. These forests are not entirely without their magic though, with some spectacular mushrooms to be found here. In recent years, these areas have become nesting areas for one of our small birds of prey, the Merlin.

There are many commercially planted forests adjacent to the Park. Some of these areas are being transferred by Coillte (the state forestry service) to the Park once the trees have been harvested. Many of these areas have already been harvested, the most notable being St. Saviour's Wood in Glendalough which is being replanted with 10,000 native trees. Another area, which is currently being harvested is around the slopes of Derrybawn. Some areas may be allowed to regenerate naturally. The colourful Foxglove often takes over an area which has recently been felled.