

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LAMBAY ISLAND

SITE CODE: 000204

Lambay Island is a large (250 ha.) inhabited island lying 4 km off Portrane on the north Co. Dublin coast. It is privately owned and is accessible by boat from Rogerstown Quay.

The island rises to 127 m and is surrounded by steep cliffs on the north, east and south slopes. These cliffs contain good diversity in height, slope and aspect. The west shore is low-lying and the land slopes gently eastwards to the summit in the centre of the island. The underlying geology is very varied, but is dominated by igneous rocks (of andesitic type) and ash. Also present are shales and limestones of Silurian origin, limestone conglomerates, and shales from the Old Red Sandstone era. The bedrock is exposed on the fringing cliffs and in rocky outcrops; elsewhere it is overlain by varying depths of glacial drift.

Most of the western third of the island is intensively farmed (mostly pasture), and there are small areas of parkland, deciduous and coniferous woodland, buildings, walled gardens and the harbour. Much of the rest of the island is a mixture of less intensively grazed land, rocky outcrops, patches of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), and cliff slopes with typical maritime vegetation e.g. Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene maritima*), Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) and Spring Squill (*Scilla verna*). Some sheltered gullies have small areas of scrub woodland dominated by Elder (*Sambucus nigra*). Vegetated sea cliffs are listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive.

Lambay supports the only colony of Grey Seals on the east coast. Although it is a long established breeding site for this species, it remains relatively small (45-60 individuals) probably because of the restricted area suitable for breeding. A herd of Fallow Deer (up to c. 80) roams the higher parts of the island, and a small number of wallabies (c. 10) survive in a feral state. This island may also hold the last Irish population of the Ship Rat, a species listed in the vertebrate Red Data Book.

Lambay Island is internationally important for its breeding seabirds. The most numerous species is the Guillemot, with almost 52,000 individuals on the cliffs. Razorbills (3,646 individuals), Kittiwakes (5,102 individuals), Herring Gulls (2,500 pairs), Cormorants (605 pairs), Shags (1,164 pairs), Puffins (235 pairs), and small numbers of Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls also breed (all figures from 1995). Between 1991 and 1995 Fulmar numbers varied between 573-737 pairs. There is a small colony (<100 pairs) of the nocturnal Manx Shearwater on the island and up to 20 pairs of Common Terns have bred in recent years. A few Black Guillemots have been recorded on Lambay, but it is not clear if they breed. A pair of Peregrines are known to breed on the island.

In winter the most notable bird species on Lambay Island is the Greylag Goose with numbers peaking at 1,000, though in recent winters there has been a decline to 400-700 individuals. There is also a small wintering flock of Barnacle Geese (up to 50), and recently Brent Geese (up to 100) have started to occur regularly. Small numbers of Great Northern Diver and Red-throated Diver are also present in winter.

An intensive survey of the natural history of Lambay Island was carried out in 1906 and published in the Irish Naturalist. A similar, comparative survey has been carried out in the early 1990's and it is hoped this will be published soon. With this background, Lambay is an excellent site for studies of marine biology, terrestrial fauna and flora, geology, geomorphology and ecology.

The island has been maintained as a wildlife sanctuary by its owners and no threats are envisaged should the present land use continue. Rodents may be causing some damage to the populations of burrow-nesting sea-birds.

Lambay Island has good examples of vegetated sea cliffs, a habitat listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, and these cliffs hold internationally important populations of sea-birds. The site is also of conservation for the population of Grey Seal, a species listed on Annex II of this directive, that it supports.

8.11.2001