

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: PUFFIN ISLAND SPA

SITE CODE: 004003

Puffin Island lies approximately 0.5 km off the northern side of St Finan's bay in south-west Co. Kerry. It is a long, narrow island of Old Red Sandstone. The island is almost divided into two halves – the southern half is a long narrow, rocky ridge, rising to 130 m, while the northern half broadens into a grassy plateau though has a high point of 159 m. The island is surrounded by mostly steep cliffs and slopes. The vegetation of the main part of the island is a typical maritime grassy sward, though nine different plant communities have been distinguished, including a small area of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) heath. A Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) community dominates the slopes. In the past Puffin Island was grazed quite heavily by sheep, and today rabbits are common.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Razorbill and Puffin. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds.

Puffin Island is one of the most important seabird sites in Ireland. In the recent Seabird 2000 survey, it was rated as of international importance for its breeding populations of Storm Petrel (5,177 pairs), Manx Shearwater (6,329 pairs) and Puffin (5,125 individuals). The colony of Puffins was the largest recorded in Ireland during the survey, while that of Manx Shearwater is the second largest colony after the Blaskets. The island also supports nationally important populations of Fulmar (447 pairs in 2000), Lesser Black-backed Gull (139 pairs in 2000), Great Black-backed Gull (72 pairs in 2000) and Razorbill (800 pairs in 1982 - incomplete survey in 2000). Other seabirds which breed are Shag (5+ pairs in 2000), Kittiwake (250 pairs in 1982), and Guillemot (250 pairs in 1982).

A further bird species of conservation importance which breeds on Puffin Island is Chough, with up to 3 pairs recorded in 1992 and at least one pair in 2000. During winter the resident population may be joined by other birds that breed on the mainland. The presence of Chough and Storm Petrel is of particular note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Puffin Island is owned by BirdWatch Ireland and is managed for conservation. The island is also a Statutory Nature Reserve. Unauthorised grazing, which has occurred in the past, is the main threat to the island as this could lead to erosion of the fragile soil cover.

8.9.2006