

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: DEENISH ISLAND AND SCARIFF ISLAND SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004175**

Deenish Island and Scariff Island are small- to medium-sized islands situated between 5 and 7 km west of Lamb's Head off the Co. Kerry coast; they are thus very exposed to the force of the Atlantic Ocean. Scariff is the larger of the two. It is steep-sided all the way around and rises to a peak of 252 m. The highest cliffs are on the south side. The island vegetation is a mix of maritime grassland, areas dominated by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and heathy areas with Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). There are the ruins of a monastic settlement and a cottage in the north-east sector of the island. Deenish is less rugged than Scariff, and rises to 144 m in its southern half; the northern half is lower and flatter. The vegetation is mostly grassland, with some heath occurring on the higher ground. Old fields are now overgrown with Bracken and brambles (*Rubus* spp.). The sea areas to 500 m around the islands are included to provide a 'rafting' area for the shearwaters.

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 and Arctic Tern.

The islands support important populations of breeding seabirds. The Seabird 2000 survey recorded 1,960 pairs of Manx Shearwater on Scariff Island and 351 pairs on Deenish in 2000, giving a total of 2,311 pairs which is equivalent to c. 5% of the national total. On Scariff, the shearwaters breed in burrows on the cliff tops on the south and west of the island. Birds also breed within the ruins, including the souterrain below the oratory. On Deenish, birds breed in burrows on steep grassy slopes with rock outcrops in a limited area on the south-east side of the island. Scariff Island has long been known as a breeding site for Storm Petrel. Whilst there are no recent survey data for this nocturnal species, an estimate of between 1,000 and 10,000 pairs is given, with several hundreds also estimated for Deenish Island. Scariff also supports nationally important populations of Fulmar (385 pairs in 2000) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (97 pairs in 2000). Deenish Island is a traditional site for nesting terns, with 54 pairs of Arctic Tern present in 1995 - a population of national importance. Other seabirds which breed on the islands are Shag (5 pairs in 2000), Herring Gull (28+ pairs in 2000), Great Black-backed Gull (7 pairs in 2000) and Black Guillemot (several pairs).

Chough is a resident species on Scariff, with 2 pairs recorded in 1992. Other species which breed on the islands include Oystercatcher, Skylark, Wheatear, Stonechat, Rock Pipit and Raven.

There are no apparent threats to the breeding birds of these islands due partly to their inaccessibility. However, the islands have been grazed by sheep in the past and a herd of feral goats existed on Scariff in the 1980s; Deenish Island was grazed by rabbits at the same time - excessive grazing could lead to soil erosion.

Deenish Island and Scariff Island SPA is a site of high ornithological importance on account of the nationally important populations of Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Fulmar, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Arctic Tern. Future surveys may show the Storm Petrel population to be of international importance. Also of note is that Storm Petrel and Arctic Tern, as well as Chough, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.