SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYMASTOCKER DUNES

SITE CODE: 001089

This site is located at Ballymastocker Bay, south of Portsalon on the west side of Lough Swilly. The underlying rock is predominantly of acidic quartzite.

The main interest of the site lies in its sand dunes, which comprise foredunes on the eastern side, grading into more stable grey or fixed dunes on the western side.

The foredunes are dominated by Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), with some Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*), goosefoot (*Chenopodium* spp.), Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) and the scarce, Ray's Knotgrass (*Polygonum oxyspermum* subsp. *raii*) also occurring. The fixed dunes support a low, grassy, herb-rich sward, which are particularly species-rich in the southern half of the site. Plant species occurring on the fixed dunes include Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), eyebright (*Euphrasia* spp.), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), Field Gentian (*Gentianella campestris*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) and Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*).

In some areas of the fixed dunes, where grazing pressure is low, several orchid species are found, including Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza* spp.). Some areas of fixed dunes are prone to flooding and here additional species such as Marsh Arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) are found.

The dunes are particularly vulnerable to overgrazing by rabbits and domestic stock. Ballymastocker is a popular recreational area used by swimmers and sun-bathers. Despite pressures from grazing and recreational activities, the dunes are relatively intact.

Other habitats found on the site include a large, sandy beach, lowland dry grassland, rocky sea cliffs, a small brackish pond, several streams and small areas of heath, scrub and broadleaved woodland.

The site, particularly in areas prone to flooding or of standing water, is used by several bird species, including Curlew and Lapwing.

The site is relatively small, but includes good examples of a range of coastal habitat types. The fixed dunes are of considerable conservation significance, as this habitat is listed, with priority status, on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

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