SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYCOTTON ISLANDS

SITE CODE: 001978

This site comprises two islands, situated 1km east of the village of Ballycotton in east Cork. The outer island is the larger of the two (4ha) and rises to a height of over 35m. Low cliffs occur on the larger island, those on the north side being the highest. There is a lighthouse on the larger island. The inner, smaller island has an area of 2.4ha and is situated very close to the mainland, where it can be reached by foot at low tide. The smaller island is flatter than the main one and rises to less than half its height. Both islands are composed of Old Red Sandstone.

The main vegetation of both islands consists of grassland, that on the larger island being dominated by Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), that on the smaller by Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*). The flora and vegetation of these islands appear to be fairly typical of such maritime situations, with sea-spurrey (*Spergularia* spp.), Sea Campion (*Silene uniflora*) and Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*) accompanying the dominant grass species. Areas in the east and south of the main island which hold most of the breeding seabirds are rather sparsely vegetated. In consequence the flora of the smaller island shows greater diversity than that found on the main island.

The main interest of this site lies in the colonies of seabird species that it holds: Cormorant (70 pairs, pre-1990), Herring Gull (60-80 pairs, pre-1990, 500 pairs in the 1970s), Great Black-backed Gull (11-12 pairs, pre-1990), Lesser Black-backed Gull (1-2 pairs in 1989), Fulmar (1-2 pairs, pre-1990) and Shelduck (1-2 pairs, pre-1990).

Several non-seabird species also breed on the islands: Rock Dove (15-16 pairs, pre-1990), Rock Pipit (10-15 pairs, pre-1990) and Chough (1 pair, pre-1990).

Small numbers of Grey Seal (maximum about 5, pre-1990) are regularly seen in the seas surrounding the site. This species is threatened within the E.U. and is listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

Rats are found on the main island, but do not appear to be present on the smaller one. The site also supports goats (up to 12 on the main island and up to 8 on the smaller one, pre-1990). The site is adjacent to the Ballycotton/ Shanagarry SPA.

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