SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: INISHTURK

SITE CODE: 000509

Inishturk Island lies approximately 9km south-west of Clare Island and 9km from the mainland. The island is important because of its flora and birdlife, especially seabirds. Much of the interest is associated with the cliffs, formed of Ordovician slates and rising to over 200m in places. These encircle the island and are at their highest at the westernmost end.

The cliff tops are vegetated by plantain swards (*Plantago maritima*, *P. coronopus*). Heath Pearlwort (*Sagina subulata*), Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) and Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) grow on the rocks, along with Scottish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia scotica*) and other typical maritime plants.

The underlying bedrock is exposed in many places, and a heathy community has developed there – it supports Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) and species typical of western heath.

Spotted Rock-rose (*Tuberaria guttata*), a Red Data Book species, has been recorded in the areas of heath. This species is confined to Cork, Galway and Mayo – Inishturk is its most northerly station.

Rudimentary woodland is becoming established and spreading on higher ridges. There, Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are the main species, with some Aspen (*Populus tremula*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*).

The cliffs play host to several species of breeding seabirds – Fulmar (775 pairs in 1969) and Black Guillemot (28 individuals in 1969). Other breeding seabirds in 1969 included Razorbill (168 individuals), Guillemot (109 individuals) and Puffin (28 individuals). Manx Shearwaters were recorded breeding in 1977 and Storm Petrel may have been breeding. Arctic Tern has nested here in the past (30 pairs in 1969) but were not recorded in 1979/1984.

Inishturk is a traditional wintering site for Barnacle Geese. Chough, a species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, breeds on the island, with one or two pairs and eight non-breeding birds recorded in 1992. Inishturk was a former recent site for the Corncrake, but none were reported in 1993.

The Grey Seal breeds on some of the secluded beaches on the island. This species is listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive, as it is threatened in the European Union.

An important feature of the island is the farming practices, which are traditional and generally less intensive than on the mainland. Small-scale rotational farming is common.

Inishturk has a flora and fauna typical of a western island where traditional farming methods are practiced. The presence of the rare plant Spotted Rock-rose is notable. The seabird colonies are of national importance, especially for Fulmar and Black Guillemot. Other important bird species are Barnacle Geese and Chough.

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