SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DURSEY ISLAND

SITE CODE: 000086

Dursey Island forms the extremity of the Beara Peninsula in Co. Cork apart from the Bull and Cow Rocks isolated some 3km offshore. It is a sandstone ridge with three separate hills, the central one of which rises to 250m. At the eastern end the island is wide enough to accommodate fields on the south-eastern side but towards the west it narrows until it is a simple ridge with cliffs around the edge. The highest cliffs occur on the north-western side where at Foilanima they reach over 150m.

While there are some small outcrops of rock away from the cliffs - the largest at the eastern end opposite the mainland where Heath Pearlwort (*Sagina subulata*) grows - the ground is mostly covered by shallow peat or a slatey glacial till. Heath is the predominant vegetation with permanent pasture in the fields. The heath is based on Autumn Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) with Cross-leaved Heath (*E. tetralix*) and Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*).

A good selection of other species are also present, among them Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), sedges (*Carex panicea*, *C. pilulifera*, *C. binervis*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). On the back (north-west) of the island the greater exposure allows Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and a hairy form of Heather (var. *hirsuta*) into the canopy, both of which are unusual so far south. There are also abundant liverworts (*Scapania* spp., *Frullania* spp.) and some *Sphagnum* mosses producing a deeper peat on which Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) is noticeable.

In places through the heath there are small springs around which Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) occur. Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) is rather common and there is Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) also.

In the most permanent springs Blinks (*Montia fontana*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*), Round-leaved Crowfoot (*Ranunculus omiophyllus*) and Yellow Centaury (*Cicendia filiformis*) are frequent – the latter characteristic of heaths in the extreme south-west. Chaffweed (*Anagallis minima*) also occurs on track edges.

Grassland on the island is un-intensive and contains species such as Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*) and Eyebright (*Euphrasia* spp).

Close to the sea, plantains (*Plantago coronopus*, *P. maritimus*), Procumbent Pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*) and Allseed (*Radiola linoides*) assume greater importance in the community until at the extremity of the island they alone form a smooth green skin 1-

2cm about the peat. This is plantain sward, characteristic of the most exposed sites on the west coast but especially well-developed here.

Dursey has a sizeable population of Fulmar (275 pairs in early 1990's) with, at that time, Shag (10 pairs), Herring Gull (50 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (6 pairs). There are also many Choughs, estimated at 10 pairs in 1992. These feed in pastures where there have been animals grazing so they are intimately tied up with land use.

In summary the island has important Fulmar and Chough populations with varied examples of exposed heathland and maritime vegetation.

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