SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ROSSCARBERY ESTUARY

SITE CODE: 001075

Roscarbery Estuary, situated on the west Cork coast, is a sea inlet fed by small rivers from the north and north-west. The northern part of the estuary, above the causeway carrying the Skibbereen road, is maintained as a lake by a weir but the southern empties and fills normally on the tide. The mouth of the inlet is nearly closed by a broad spit of sand behind Creggan Strand but above this there are extensive sand flats where quays and a training wall indicate a former maritime importance. Currently the site is used for growing young oyster stock in cages.

Much of the boundary of the site follows the roads but there are three places where the vegetation of adjacent ground is interesting. One is the Creggan Spit itself where a new dune ridge extends westwards into the channel. Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) is scattered over this ground with such beach plants as Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*) and Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*). With stability Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) occur in noticeably mossy grassland.

Northwards this community runs into a sheltered saltmarsh where Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardi*) and Sharp Rush (*J. acutus*), or Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*) dominate the ground. There are also sedges such as Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*) and Long-bracted Sedge (*C. extensa*), Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) and Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) which is relatively rare on the Cork coast.

The western cliffs around Downeen Point are covered by maritime heath with a high species content. The community varies from a classical Autumn Gorse (*Ulex gallii*) stand with Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) to a more open grassy cover of fescues (*Festuca rubra*, *F. ovina*) and Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) with Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and sorrels (*Rumex acetosa*, *R. acetosella*) abundant. This is partly subject to spray during storms and Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Common Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*), Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*) and Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) occur at random through the turf because of this input. Red Bartsia (*Odontites vernus*) occurs on maritime rocks in one of its native forms.

The estuary supports a variety of shorebirds in winter like many of the Cork inlets. Only Ringed Plover (average peak 226, 1984/85 - 86/87) reach numbers of national importance but there are notable flocks of eleven other species, among them Black-tailed Godwit (74), Curlew (805) Oystercatcher (94) and Greenshank (14). A feature of the site is the fluctuation of bird numbers recorded, perhaps because of the relatively small size of the estuary and the possibilities of disturbance. For example in

the five recent counts (1984-87) there were no Ringed Plover present on three occasions while the total varied between 440 and 11 on the other two. In a previous series of counts the total peak wader number was 1400 in 1971/72 and 400 in 1974/75.

17.11.2009