SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CAPEL ISLAND AND KNOCKADOON HEAD

SITE CODE: 000083

Knockadoon Head marks the end of one of the regular sandstone ridges that run east-west through Cork and Kerry – an anticline separating the two limestone-filled synclines of Castlemartyr and Cloyne. The rock has a slaty character and forms sloping cliffs and gullies, especially on the back of Capel Island.

Capel Island is grazed consistently so has a grassy vegetation cover in which heath plants are suppressed. On the mainland, however, these develop well and there is an interesting mosaic of heathland types, especially in the vicinity of the Tower and on the flattish ground to the west. The common species are Autumn Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), with some Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) and Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*).

In open places between the gorse, Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Common Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*) are distinctive. There are frequent outcrops of rock with many lichen species (mainly *Cladonia* spp.), as well as Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*).

To the west, occasional peaty depressions in the ground allow sedges such as *Carex flacca* and *C. panicea*, Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) to encroach on the vegetation, along with some Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*).

The cliffs on Capel Island are used for nesting by Cormorants, of which there are approximately 70 pairs. Gull populations have fallen in recent years but there remain approximately 75 pairs of Herring Gull and 10 pairs of Great Black-backed Gull. The mainland cliffs also have Cormorants (9) Herring Gulls (40), some Fulmars and a few Black Guillemots.

Much of the area, including the seabed between the island and the mainland, is protected as a National Nature Reserve, created in 1985.

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