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National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Lough Carra SPA 004051



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Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance
- exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

• population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and

• the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and

• there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Notes/Guidelines:

1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.

2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.

3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.

4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.

5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

Qualifying Interests

* indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive

004051 Lough Carra SPA

A182 Common Gull Larus canus

Please note that this SPA overlaps with Lough Carra/Mask Complex SAC (001774). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the overlapping site as appropriate.

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: www.npws.ie/Publications

NPWS Documents

Year :	2021
Title :	Estimated foraging ranges of the breeding seabirds of Ireland's marine special protected area network
Author :	Power, A.; McDonnell, P.; Tierney, T.D.
Series :	Published NPWS report

Other References

Year :	1991		
Title :	The status of seabirds in Britain and Ireland		
Author :	Lloyd, C.; Tasker, M.L.; Partridge, K.		
Series :	Poyser Monographs Volume: 50		
Year :	2003		
Title :	Implications for seaward extensions to existing breeding seabird colony Special Protection Areas		
Author :	McSorley, C.A.; Dean, B.J.; Webb, A.; Reid J.B.		
Series :	JNCC Report No. 329		
Year :	2004		
Title :	Seabird populations of Britain and Ireland		
Author :	Mitchell, P.I.; Newton, S.F.; Ratcliffe, N.; Dunn, T.E.		
Series :	Poyser, London		
Year :	2019		
Title :	Desk-based revision of seabird foraging ranges used for HRA screening		
Author :	Woodward, I.; Thaxter, C.B.; Owen, E.; Cook, A.S.C.P.		
Series :	BTO Research Report No. 724		
Year :	2021		
Title :	Common Gull (Larus canus), version 1.1. In Birds of the World (S. M. Billerman, Editor)		
Author :	Moskoff, W.; Bevier, L.R.; Rasmussen, P.C.		
Series :	Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA		
Year :	2023		
Title :	Seabirds Count: a census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015-2021)		
Author :	Burnell, D.; Perkins, A.J.; Newton, S.F.; Bolton, M.; Tierney, T.D.; Dunn, T.E.		
Series :	Lynx Nature Books, Barcelona		
Year :	2024		
Title :	Seabird Population Trends and Causes of Change: 1986–2023, the annual report of the Seabird Monitoring Programme		
Author :	Harris, S.J.; Baker, H.; Balmer, D.E.; Bolton, M.; Burton, N.H.K.; Caulfield, E.; Clarke, J.A.E.; Dunn, T.E.; Evans, T.J.; Hereward, H.R.F.; Humphreys, E.M.; Money, S.; O'Hanlon, N.J.		
Series :	BTO Research Report 771		

Conservation Objectives for : Lough Carra SPA [004051]

A182 Common Gull *Larus canus*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Common Gull in Lough Carra SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Breeding population size	Number of Apparently Occupied Nests (AON)	Long term SPA population trend is stable or increasing	The islands in Lough Carra have traditionally supported nesting gulls. The population of breeding Common Gull was estimated to be approximately 49 pairs in 1988, based on a count of individual birds (Lloyd et al., 1991). A peak count of 65 breeding pairs was recorded in 1999 (Mitchell et al., 2004). The population of Common Gull declined to 24 pairs in 2016, and has stayed at a similar size in subsequent years with counts of 20, 21, and 22 pairs in 2017, 2023, and 2024 respectively, with an overall decrease of 51% between 1999 and 2024 (NPWS internal files; Burnell et al., 2023). This decline contrasts with the national population trend, which has seen an increase of 89% from 1,051 pairs in 1998 - 2002 to 1,983 pairs in 2015 - 2021 (Burnell et al., 2023)
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per breeding pair	Sufficient to maintain a stable or increasing population	There was no productivity data available for this species in this SPA. A lack of comprehensive Irish data precludes the identification of a minimum productivity rate for this species at the site and at the national level. Common Gull productivity in Scotland between 2000 and 2020 was below 0.6 chicks per breeding pair; in this time period the Scottish population of Common Gull was decreasing (Harris et al., 2024)
Distribution: extent of available nesting options within the SPA	Numbers and spatial distribution	Sufficient availability of suitable nesting sites throughout the SPA to maintain a stable or increasing population	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable nesting habitat for the breeding population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas may vary through time. This will affect the spatio- temporal patterns of use of the habitats by Common Gull. Common Gull breeding inland can nest in a variety of habitats such as grassy/heather moorland, near lakes, pools, in bogs, on open ground away from water, and cultivated grain fields (Moskoff et al., 2021). Common Gull have predominantly nested on Ballycally Islands and Kilkieran Islands within the SPA
Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability	Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Diet varies by location and season. Common Gull feeding in inland environments typically feed on earthworms and insects such as fly larvae (Moskoff et al., 2021). Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) estimate that the maximum foraging range of a Common Gull from the nest site during the breeding season is 50km (see Power et al., 2021)
Disturbance at the breeding site	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on birds at the breeding site	Disturbance events at the nest site/breeding colony level can result in a reduction of overall productivity and even lead to the abandonment of the breeding colony. The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population size and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure, which can result in increased likelihood of mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population size and spatial distribution

Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Seabird species can make extensive use of the waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific maintenance behaviours (e.g. courtship, bathing, preening) as defined in McSorley et al. (2003). Additionally, some species may engage in maintenance behaviours outside of the breeding colony but not in the water
Barriers to connectivity	Number, location, shape, and area (ha)	Barriers do not significantly impact the population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Inland breeding gulls require regular and efficient access to freshwater and terrestrial habitats ecologically connected to the colony in order to forage as well as to engage in other maintenance behaviours. Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) estimate that the maximum foraging range of a Common Gull from the nest site during the breeding season is 50km (see Power et al., 2021)



