ISSN 2009-4086

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

West Donegal Islands SPA 004230

NPWS
An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

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Citation:

NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: West Donegal Islands SPA 004230. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Series Editors: Maria Long and Colin Heaslip
ISSN 2009-4086

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***

004230	West Donegal Islands SPA
A018	Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
A045	Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
A122	Corncrake *Crex crex*
A182	Common Gull *Larus canus*
A184	Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Please note that this SPA overlaps with Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC (001141). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the overlapping or adjacent site(s) 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 :	2007
Title :	Seabird Productivity at East and South coast colonies in Ireland in 2007: Site accounts
Author :	Trewby, M.; Burt E.; Newton, S.
Series :	Unpublished report to NPWS
Year :	2013
Title :	A review of the SPA network of sites in the Republic of Ireland
Author :	NPWS
Series :	Published Report
Year :	2019
Title :	Irish wetland bird survey: waterbird status and distribution 2009/10-2015/16
Author :	Lewis, L.J.; Burke, B.; Fitzgerald, N.; Tierney, T.D.; Kelly, S.
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 106
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 :	1900
Title :	The Birds of Ireland: An Account of the Distribution, Migrations and Habits of Birds as Observed in Ireland, with All Additions to the Irish List
Author :	Ussher, R.J.; Warren, R.
Series :	Gurney and Jackson
Year :	1954
Title :	The Birds of Ireland. Their Migrations and Habits. Assessed by G.R. Humphreys
Author :	Kennedy, P.G.; Ruttledge R.F.; Scroope, C.F.
Series :	London: Oliver and Boyd
Year :	1973
Title :	Population Dynamics of Barnacle Geese, *Branta leucopsis*, in Ireland
Author :	Cabot, D.
Series :	Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section B: Biological, Geological, and Chemical Science, 73, 415–443
Year :	1995
Title :	Impacts of hunting disturbance on waterbirds - a review
Author :	Madsen, J.; Fox, A.D.
Series :	Wildlife Biology 1(4):193-207
Year :	1996
Title :	The ecology of the Corncrake, with special reference to the effect of mowing on breeding production
Author :	Tyler, G.
Series :	PhD thesis, University College Cork

Year :	1997
Title :	Populations, ecology and threats to the Corncrake *Crex crex* in Europe
Author :	Green, R. E.; Rocamora, G.; Schäffer, N.
Series :	Vogelwelt, 118, 117-134
Year :	1999
Title :	The Corncrake (*Crex Crex*) in Ireland
Author :	Mc Devitt, A. M.; Casey, C.
Series :	Proceedings International Corncrake Workshop 1998, Hilpoltstein/Germany. Eds. Schaffer & Mamme, U. (eds.)
Year :	1999
Title :	Managing grassland for wild geese in Britain: a review
Author :	Vickery, J.; Gill, J.
Series :	Biological Conservation, 89(1), pp.93-106
Year :	2001
Title :	The effects of flooding lowland wet grassland on soil macroinvertebrate prey of breeding wading birds
Author :	Ausden, M.; Sutherland, W.; James R.
Series :	Journal of Applied Ecology 38: 320–338
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 :	2010
Title :	How Representative is the Current Monitoring of Breeding Seabirds in the UK?
Author :	Cook, A.S.C.P.; Robinson, R.A.
Series :	BTO Research Report No. 573
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 :	2019
Title :	Report under Article 12 of the Birds Directive Period 2013-2018
Author :	EEA
Series :	European Environment Agency. European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity. Pp 1-9. https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/Converters/run_conversion?file=ie/eu/art12/envxztxxq/IE_birds_reports_20191031-130157.xml&conv=612&source=remote
Year :	2019
Title :	Use of microsatellite-based paternity assignment to establish where Corn Crake *Crex crex* chicks are at risk from mechanized mowing
Author :	Green, R. E.; Brekke, P.; Ward, H.; Slaymaker, M.; van der Velde, M.; Komdeur, J.; Dugdale, H. L.
Series :	Ibis, 161 (4), 890-894

Year :	2020
Title :	Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (S. M. Billerman, Editor)
Author :	Weseloh, D. V.; Hebert, C. E.; Mallory, M. L.; Poole, A. F.; Ellis, J. C.; Pyle, P.; Patten, M. A.
Series :	Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA
Year :	2020
Title :	Diet of corncrakes *Crex crex* and prey availability in relation to meadow management
Author :	Arbeiter, S.; Flinks, H.; Grünwald, J.; Tanneberger, F.
Series :	Ardea, 108 (1), 55-64
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 :	2021
Title :	European Shag (*Gulosus aristotelis*), version 1.2. In Birds of the World (B. K. Keeney, Editor)
Author :	Orta, J., Garcia, E. F. J.; Jutglar, F.; Kirwan, G. M.; Boesman, P. F. D.
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 :	2023
Title :	Home range of a long-distance migrant, the Greenland Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*, throughout the annual cycle
Author :	Doyle, S.; Cabot, D.; Griffin, L.; Kane, A.; Colhoun, K.; Redmond, C.; Walsh, A.; McMahon, B.J.
Series :	Bird Study, 70(1-2), pp.37-46
Year :	2024
Title :	European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)
Author :	JNCC
Series :	https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/european-shag-phalacrocorax-aristotelis/
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

A018 Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

To maintain the Favourable conservation condition of Shag in West Donegal Islands 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	West Donegal Islands SPA consists of a series of small to moderate-sized islands including Gola, Inishmeane, Inishsirrer and Umfin. This site is challenging to survey and as a result there are few complete counts of this SPA from a single breeding season. In 1999, an estimated 40 pairs bred on Gola and in 2000 an estimated 30 pairs bred on Inishsirrer (Mitchell et al., 2004). In 2018, 41 pairs were estimated to be breeding across Gola, Umfin Island and Inishsirrer (Burnell et al., 2023). A total of 57 pairs were recorded breeding in this SPA in 2023 indicating a somewhat stable population (NPWS internal files). The national population of Shag has increased by 40% between surveys in 1998 - 2002 and 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. Trewby et al. (2007) reported that the average productivity from Lambay Island SPA was 1.69 (± 0.08 SE) chicks fledged per AON in 2007 (135 pairs across five subplots). Further monitoring and research work is required in order to identify a minimum productivity rate for this species at this site and at the national level. Shag productivity in Scotland has averaged 1.28 chicks fledged per pair between 1986 and 2019 (JNCC, 2024). In this time period the Scottish population of Shag has decreased 47% (Burnell et al., 2023). However, the cause of decline may not be related to productivity rate but rather due to significant losses of that adult population during "wrecks" in some winters during this time period (JNCC, 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 across the SPA may vary through time. This will affect the spatio-temporal patterns of use of the habitats by Shag. Typically this species breeds on sea cliffs, rocks and stacks (Orta et al., 2021)
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	The diet of Shag is almost exclusively fish, taken chiefly near the sea bed or at intermediate depths, and principally of the families Ammodytidae (sandeels), Gadidae, Clupeidae, Cottidae, and Labridae, but a wide range of other species can be taken, perhaps opportunistically (Orta et al., 2021). Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates of foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) for Shag, which are 9km, 13km, and 46km respectively (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 marine 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	Seabirds, particularly during the breeding season, require regular and efficient access to marine waters ecologically connected to the colony in order to forage as well as to engage in other maintenance behaviours. Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates of foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) for Shag, which are 9km, 13km, and 46km respectively (see Power et al., 2021)

A045 Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Barnacle Goose in West Donegal Islands SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Winter population trend	Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Barnacle Goose in Ireland has increased by 102% from 1993 - 2018 (Lewis et al., 2019) as monitored by the International Census of Greenland Barnacle Goose. During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 272 Barnacle Goose were estimated to be using this SPA (4 year mean of census counts for baseline period 1993 - 2003; see NPWS, 2013). More recent data showed a population of 194 Barnacle Goose used this SPA during the period 2013 - 2023 (4 year mean of census counts from the International Census of Greenland Barnacle Goose). This represents a population decrease of 29% since the baseline period, in contrast to the national trend
Winter spatial distribution	Hectares, time and intensity of use	Sufficient area and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support the population target	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas are likely to vary throughout the season, for example, due to variation in land management practices or the abundance of resources available (due to natural variation and other factors). This will affect the spatio-temporal patterns of use of the habitats by the wintering population
Disturbance at wintering site	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the wintering population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends (see, for example, Madsen and Fox, 1995). 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 trend and spatial distribution
Barriers to connectivity and site use	Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Barriers limiting the population's access to this SPA or ecologically important sites outside the SPA will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers must be taken into account to determine their potential impact. Access to ecologically important sites outside the SPA must also be considered as a single SPA may not satisfy all the ecological requirements of the wintering population, and it may require access to other SPAs or sites for certain activities, such as foraging when preferred foraging areas are unavailable due to disturbance, extensive flooding, or other factors

Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance	Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	This species is a grazing herbivore. Historically, in Ireland, foraging habitat included salt marsh, but currently the species is typically associated with open coastal pasture, mostly improved and semi-improved agricultural grasslands. Barnacle Goose grazes on leaves, stems, rhizomes, roots and seeds, with grass and *Plantago/Bellis/Festuca* swards comprising preferred food sources (Cabot, 1973). This species selects a preferred sward height of <10cm but birds can feed on swards >15cm if preferred areas are depleted (based on birds in Islay, see Vickery and Gill, 1999). Birds are highly likely to exhibit foraging site fidelity and may be found foraging on offshore islands as well as commuting to forage on the mainland. Maximum foraging distance is approximately 7km for wintering birds (Doyle et al., 2023)
Roost spatial distribution and extent	Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Roosting is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population. When roosting, this species uses open habitats (primarily pastures) that provide wide sightlines for the birds and which are typically adjacent to water bodies; thus, offshore islands are commonly use. Birds exhibit strong roost site fidelity (Doyle et al., 2023). Daytime roosting is also a common behaviour, where birds minimise activity levels to conserve energy, while benefitting from the vigilance of other flock members. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use; this would ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution
Supporting habitat: area and quality	Hectares and quality	Sufficient area of utilisable habitat available in ecologically important sites outside the SPA	The wintering population can make extensive use of suitable habitats in important areas outside the SPA for foraging and roosting. The extent, availability and quality of these supporting habitats may be of importance for the resilience of the SPA population. Suitable supporting habitats include those highlighted in the attributes for foraging and roosting habitat

A122 Corncrake *Crex crex*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Corncrake in West Donegal Islands SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Population size	Number of calling males	Restore the numbers of calling males to an average of at least 13 per year in any consecutive 5-year period	The breeding season of this migratory bird is mid-April to mid-September. The measure of 'calling males' is as per previous (Green et al., 1997) and recently adapted Corncrake census methods (NPWS internal files). Determination of the SPA population size involves recording calling males within suitable/known areas between 20 May - 10 July (BST 11:00 - 03:00hrs), though calling males outside this period/time are also recorded as potential breeding sites. Where multiple birds occur in close proximity, survey visits are increased to track movements of individuals and refine records. For the period 2020 - 24, the SPA held an average of 9 calling males. Agricultural practices incompatible with their breeding ecology is considered the main cause of sub-optimal breeding habitats in this SPA (NPWS internal files). Figures for the baseline period 2003 - 07 indicate that numbers of calling males fluctuated from 4 - 20, with an average of 13 for that period (NPWS, 2013; NPWS internal files)
Population trend	Percentage change in number of calling males	Long-term population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of breeding Corncrake for the period 2003 - 07 ranged from 131 - 162 calling males, with an average of 150 for that period, fewer than the Republic of Ireland total of 165 in 1993 (McDevitt and Casey, 1999) and lower than all-Ireland figures in Green et al. (1997) of 174. Recent figures for the period 2019 - 23 indicate that the population has risen to an average of c.182 calling males (151 - 218). The national population trend seems to be increasing since 2003 - 07. For this SPA made up of islands and islets, the average of 9 calling males for the period 2020 - 24 is of concern and indicates a decrease of 30.8% from the baseline period. SPA totals include any calling males located outside the SPA but ≤250m from the boundary. For the Corncrake SPA network overall, the population trend is considered broadly stable, with an average of 102 calling males for the period (2019 - 23), on par with an average of 99 for the network for the period (2003 - 07)
Spatial utilisation by breeding pairs	Percentage	Maintain the spatial utilisation of the SPA by breeding pairs at at least 50-75%	Core areas used by breeding Corncrake can be broadly defined by calculating the portion that lies within 250m of all confirmed calling males, albeit independent flightless chicks will range further (Green et al., 2019). Optimal resilience for the population relies on birds utilising suitable habitat to the maximum extent, with the population well dispersed across the SPA and not confined to isolated locations. The target range is informed by 2016 - 23 census data for the SPA, and includes estimated usage figures for the SPA where numbers of calling males in any given year were ≥ the SPA baseline figures presented in NPWS (2013). The target area is informed by typical home ranges (Tyler, 1996) and baseline population density. The mean estimated spatial distribution of Corncrake for this SPA was 81.5% for the period 2016 - 23. Meeting other targets, including that for the 'extent and condition of nesting and foraging habitat', should help achieve the spatial utilisation target

Extent and condition of nesting and foraging habitat	Hectares; condition assessment	Restore the extent and quality of this resource to support the targets relating to population size, population trend and spatial utilisation	Given its extended breeding season, the provision of tall-herb species via the creation of early and late cover areas (ELCs) in spring/autumn is beneficial to Corncrake. A ground-nesting rail, it prefers tall, well structured grass vegetation (≥20cm) in hay, arable or silage fields, rough pastures, and in stands of herbaceous species such as Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) (e.g. Green et al., 1997; Tyler, 1996; NPWS internal files). ELCs support adults by providing invertebrate prey species (NPWS internal files) and nesting habitat when meadows are unsuitable, thereby improving breeding success (e.g. via nest concealment allowing better protection from predators) and by allowing breeding to start earlier or end later. Wildlife-friendly mowing provides Corncrake with continuous cover by maintaining low mowing speeds to allow adults/young chicks escape to edges of fields rather than centres i.e. into safety of field margins/neighbouring fields
Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability	Location and hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available prey biomass to support the population targets	Nesting Corncrake are most at risk to habitat loss due to activities related to grass/crop harvesting and continuous grazing, particularly by sheep. Omnivorous in its diet, it feeds mainly on arthropods, molluscs, worms and seeds (Tyler, 1996; Arbeiter et al., 2020). The availability of earthworms and molluscs in moist habitats may explain why moist unfertilised grassland is good Corncrake habitat, as well as the suitability of the vegetation structure of some marsh vegetation (Green et al., 1997). Insects and molluscs may be vital for Corncrake in floodplain habitats, as areas with long winter floods have a lower abundance of earthworms (Ausden et al., 2001). Suitable and well-connected forage areas, with an open sward structure, ≥20cm in height, offer optimum concealment and cover to adults and young birds, which are flightless for up to 40 days post-hatching. Restoring/maintaining inter-connected mosaics of forage/refuge areas across the SPA and wider hinterland is fundamental
Disturbance to breeding sites	Level of impact	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact upon breeding Corncrake	Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing and duration of a potentially disturbing activity (e.g. grass/crop harvesting; recreational activities; summer grazing; development requiring planning permission) must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets which relate to population demographics (i.e. population size, population trend) and the spatial utilisation of the SPA by breeding Corncrakes. Agricultural activities and associated land-use in/adjacent to the SPA may cause disturbance to breeding sites and may directly impact breeding success, by confining Corncrake to limited locations; thereby increasing mortality risk and resource competition. Late summer harvesting of grass (post 15 Aug) using wildlife-friendly mowing and the retention of refuge areas significantly lowers risk to flightless chicks/moulting adults

A182 Common Gull *Larus canus*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Common Gull in West Donegal Islands 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	Ussher and Warren (1900) noted that Co. Donegal was home to considerable Common Gull colonies and Kennedy et al. (1954) states that the largest colonies in Ireland previous to 1900 existed in Co. Donegal. West Donegal Islands SPA consists of a series of small to moderate-sized islands including Gola, Inishmeane, Inishsirrer and Umfin. This site is challenging to survey and as a result there are few complete counts of this SPA from a single breeding season. In 1999, an estimated 20 pairs bred on Gola and in 2000 an estimated 15 and 40 pairs bred on Inishmeane and Inishsirrer respectively (NPWS internal files). However, Common Gull no longer breed at this SPA and it has been speculated that they have moved to a different site (NPWS internal files)
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 near marine environments typically nest on small inshore rocky stacks, islets and islands, grassy and rocky slopes, sand dunes, and the foreshore (Moskoff et al., 2021)
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. Birds foraging in marine environments feed on fish and marine invertebrates (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

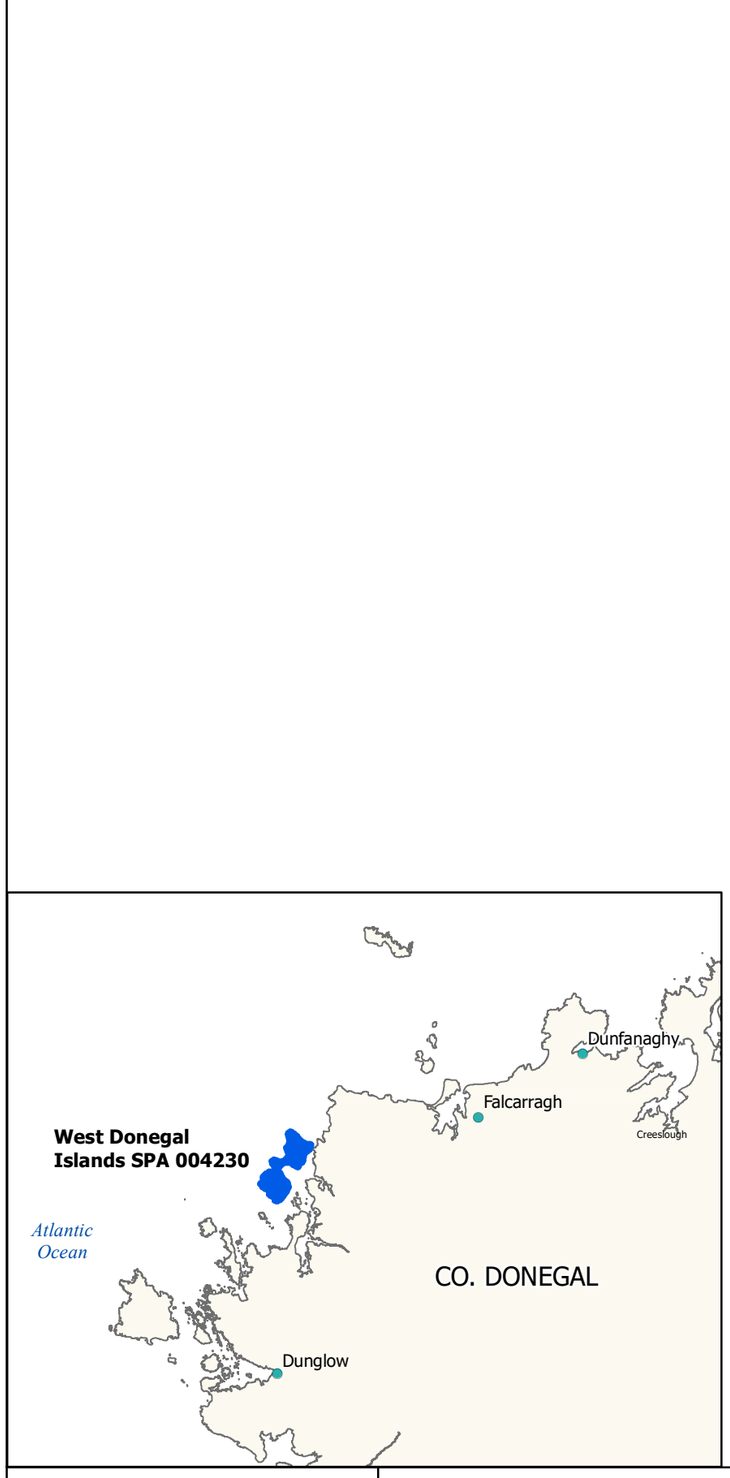
Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Seabird species can make extensive use of the marine waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific 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	Seabirds, particularly during the breeding season, require regular and efficient access to marine waters 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)

A184 Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

To maintain the Favourable conservation condition of Herring Gull in West Donegal Islands 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	West Donegal Islands SPA consists of a series of small to moderate-sized islands including Gola, Inishmeane, Inishsirrer and Umfin. This site is challenging to survey and as a result there are few complete counts of this SPA from a single breeding season. In 1999, an estimated 65 pairs bred on Gola and in 2000 an estimated 20 pairs bred on Inishsirrer (Mitchell et al., 2004). The population decreased to 51 pairs in 2018 with birds recorded breeding on Gola and Umfin Island (Burnell et al., 2023). An estimated 85 pairs were recorded breeding on Gola in 2024 indicating that the population had recovered (NPWS internal files). The natural-nesting (i.e. non-urban) Herring Gull population in Ireland has increased by 94% between national surveys in 1998 - 2002 and 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. Cook and Robinson (2010) undertook Population Viability Analyses (PVA) of a selection of breeding populations in the UK. Over their study period, Herring Gull productivity at monitored nests was 0.75. Were this level to be maintained, Herring Gull populations would decline by 60% over 25 years. For the population to stabilise, breeding success would have to increase to 1.3 - 1.5 chicks per nest per year. 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
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 Herring Gull. Typically, coastal Herring Gull colonies are located along rocky coastlines with cliffs, islets and offshore islands (Mitchell et al., 2004)
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	Herring Gull is a generalist and opportunistic feeder and can forage over both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Its diet includes fish, fish offal, bivalves, gastropods, crustaceans, squid, insects, other seabirds, small land birds, small mammals, terrestrial insects, earthworms, berries, carrion, and a wide variety of human refuse (Weseloh et al., 2020). Woodward et al. (2019) reviewed the foraging ranges of seabird species from over 300 studies including: direct tracking of birds; estimates based on flight speeds and time activity; survey observations; and speculative estimates. Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) of Herring Gull foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season, which are 15km, 59km, and 92km respectively (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 marine waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific maintenance behaviours (e.g. courtship, bathing, preening), as defined in McSorley et al. (2003)
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	Seabirds, particularly during the breeding season, require regular and efficient access to marine waters 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) provide estimates (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) of Herring Gull foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season, which are 15km, 59km, and 92km respectively (see Power et al., 2021)



Legend

West Donegal Islands SPA 004230

NPWS An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra National Parks and Wildlife Service	**MAP 1:** **WEST DONEGAL ISLANDS SPA** **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES** **SPA DESIGNATION** Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document	**SITE CODE:** **SPA 004230; version 3** **CO. DONEGAL** 0 1.25 2.5 5 Kilometres	The mapped boundaries are of an indicative and general nature only. Boundaries of designated areas are subject to revision. 	N **Map version 1** **Date: July 2024**

West Donegal Islands SPA

Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC

Dunfanaghy
Castlebane
Kill Mountain
Baile na Bó
An Cheathrú Cheanainn
An Fál Carrach
Cnoc an Duilisc
Mín Lárach
Cnoc Fola
Cnoc na Naomh
Bun na Leaca
N56
Cnoc na hArdadh Bige
An Chruach Trasna
Gort an Ghoirce
Sliabh Mhín an Chladaigh
Cnoc an Mháma
Charraig
An Mhucais
Sliabh na hArdadh Móire
An Maolchnoc
Na Leargacha
Taobh an Leithid
Carn Traonach
An Eachla Bheag
Malaidh na Seacht Leacht
Ard Loch na mBreac Beadaí
An Eachla Mhór
Bun Beag
N56
DÚNNANGAIL
Gaoth Dobhair
Dobhar
Muine Beag
An Earagail
An Dubhais
Cruach na Sagart
N56
An Grogán Mór
Cnoc Chró an Locháir
Cnoc Bhealach Gaoithe
Loch an Iúir
Cnoc na bhFaircheach
Claggan Mountain South
Ardaturr Mountain
Casheltown Mountain
Cnoc na Mine Boige
Arainn Mhór
Cnoc an Iolair
Cnoc na gCarn
An Leadhb Gharbh
Ailt an Chorráin
An Eadarna Mhór
An Eadarna Bheag
Croich Uí Bhaoill
Cruach Luchóg
An Bhinn Mhór
An Reannaigh
Cnoc Leamhnachta
Cruach an Chuilinn
Cruach Phádraig
Cnoc na Scamhthaí
Cnoc an Chró Bháin
An Clochán Liath
Cnoc Chró Bheithe
Cnoc na hAitinne
Cnoc an tSéideáin
Cnoc an Chorráin
An Machaire

Legend

- West Donegal Islands SPA 004230
- Gweedore Bay and Islands SAC 001141

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MAP 2:
WEST DONEGAL ISLANDS SPA
CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
OVERLAPPING AND ADJACENT SITES

Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document

SITE CODE:
SPA 004230; version 3
CO. DONEGAL

0 1.25 2.5 5 Kilometres

N

Map version 1
Date: July 2024