



Site Name: Clonakilty Bay SAC

Site Code: 000091

Clonakilty Bay in west Cork is an intertidal expanse that stretches from Clonakilty to the open sea, and comprises two small estuaries separated by Inchydoney Island. The site also includes adjacent sand dunes and inland marshes, and therefore is a coastal complex with a good diversity of habitats.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
- [1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines
- [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*
- [2150] Decalcified Dune Heath*

Sand flats dominate the intertidal area, although mudflats occur at the sheltered upper end of the inlets. The vegetation consists of algal mats (*Enteromorpha* spp.), with brown seaweeds (*Fucus* spp.) occurring where the coast is rocky. The invasive Cord-grass (*Spartina* sp.) occurs in places. The intertidal flats have a typical diversity of macro-invertebrates, including *Arenicola marina*, *Scrobicularia plana*, *Hediste diversicolor*, *Nephtys hombergii*, *N. cirrosa*, *Hydrobia ulvae* and *Cerastoderma edule*.

Sand dunes grade from a strandline, colonised by Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) and Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), through to fixed dunes vegetated by grasses, small herbs and several species of orchid. They support an interesting array of plants, amongst which Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) and Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) are some of the most noticeable. Embryonic shifting dunes and white Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dunes are also represented. Of particular interest is a small area of decalcified dune heath with some Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

Inland of the western estuary, an extensive area of wetland occurs, which in itself contains a fine range of habitats from saline lagoons, to brackish grasslands, open freshwater marsh and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) scrub. Species found here are characteristic of marshy areas and include Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*) and Marsh

Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*). The saline influence is evident by the occurrence of species such as Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardi*) and Sea Rush (*J. maritimus*).

The site contains a good diversity and density of waterfowl, with over 7,000 waders and wildfowl occurring regularly. Seven species have populations of national importance: Shelduck (168), Grey Plover (76), Lapwing (2,509), Dunlin (1,508) Curlew (1,231), Redshank (263) and Greenshank (27). The site is most noted, however, for its population of Black-tailed Godwit (866), which is of international importance and comprises over 10% of the national total. Amongst the other species which occur, there are notable populations of Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, both of which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. All counts given are average winter peaks over either two or three seasons from 1994/95 to 1996/97. Herons commonly use the site and a heronry exists in the trees near Clonakilty.

Otter spraints were found frequently during a recent survey of the marsh area. This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The site is under pressure from a number of sources, notably recreation and tourism developments and agricultural improvements, including drainage and fertiliser application.

This site is of considerable scientific interest because it contains a good diversity of coastal habitats. These habitats show a succession from salt to freshwater influences and include six which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Its value is enhanced considerably by the birdlife it supports. The occurrence of Black-tailed Godwit in internationally important numbers is particularly significant. The site also supports nationally important numbers of seven other species of waterfowl as well as two species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.