

Site Name: Inishtrahull SAC

Site Code: 000154

This site is situated approximately 12.5 km north-east of Malin Head in Co. Donegal, and comprises the whole of the island of Inishtrahull, as well as a group of islands, the Tor Rocks, which lie approximately 2 km north-north-west of Inishtrahull and the intervening sea. The Tor Rocks, the most northerly point of land in Ireland, comprise six rocky pinnacles rising to approximately 20 m above the High Water Mark, with about eight sub-tidal rocks clustered about them. The island of Inishtrahull (34 ha) rises to 43 m at its western end and extends west-east for some 1.5 km. The geology of the site is of Lewisian gneiss, considered to be the oldest rock in Ireland, and having affinities with the rocks of southern Greenland and some of the Hebridean Islands. The soils found on Inishtrahull are either thin glacial tills or peaty podzols.

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):

[1230] Vegetated Sea Cliffs

For most of its length the coastline of Inishtrahull consists of cliffs. These are not particularly high - the highest point of the island being only 43 m at the western end where the cliffs are best developed. The cliffs are generally not sheer, and are indented by deep clefts. Plant species associated with the cliffs include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and English Stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*). In addition to these more common species, the cliff habitat supports the rare Red Data Book species Scots Lovage (*Ligusticum scoticum*). This species was first discovered on the island in 1938 and has been recorded there as recently as 1997.

The vegetation of the interior of the island of Inishtrahull is predominantly grassland; trees are entirely lacking. A survey of the flora in 1939-1942 listed records for 119 vascular plant species.

The site supports important colonies of a variety of seabird species: Shag (500 pairs in 1991/92; 127 pairs in 1999), Herring Gull (500 pairs in 1991/92; 20 pairs in 1999), Fulmar (250 pairs in 1991/92; 95 pairs in 1999), Eider (over 200 pairs in 1991/92, the first Irish breeding site for the species), Lesser Black-backed Gull (100 pairs in 1991/92; 35 pairs in 1999), Great Black-backed Gull (50 pairs in 1991/92; 40 pairs in

1999), Common Gull (30 pairs in 1991/92 and in 1999), Kittiwake (43 pairs in 1999) and Black Guillemot (20 pairs in 1991/92; 12 individuals in 1999). Small numbers of breeding Common Tern and Arctic Tern have been recorded in the past, but have not been seen recently.

Several other bird species also breed, notably Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Wheatear, Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover. A lighthouse on the island attracts large numbers of migrant birds on overcast nights and, because of its strategic position, Inishtrahull is an important staging area for passage migrants. On occasion, the site supports a flock of Barnacle Goose (153 individuals in 1993) which feed here during the winter.

Grey Seals frequent the area and haul out on Inishtrahull - up to 600 individuals have been recorded from the area during the summer.

The site is of considerable conservation significance, particularly for the presence of vegetated sea cliffs, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.