



Site Name: Slieve Tooley/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay SAC

Site Code: 000190

This large and scenic site covers the northern half of the Slieve League peninsula in Co. Donegal, stretching from Ardara in the east towards Glencolumbkille and Glen Bay in the west. Along its northern side, the site is fringed by a range of coastal habitats, including sea cliffs, stacks, islets, caves, sand dunes, the Loughros Beg Bay estuary and salt marshes. Inland, the area is generally mountainous, rising to 511 m O.D. south of Lough Croaghballaghdown. The underlying rock is quartzite.

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
- [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*
- [2140] Decalcified *Empetrum* Dunes*
- [2150] Decalcified Dune Heath*
- [4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
- [7130] Blanket Bogs (Active)*
- [1014] Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*)
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- [1364] Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)

Blanket bog covers most of the lower slopes inland. The surface of the bog is gently undulating, with a hummock/hollow microtopography. Hummocks are formed of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.), including such species as *S. capillifolium*, *S. subnitens*, *S. papillosum* and occasionally *S. imbricatum*. Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) colonise the hummocks and are generally abundant. White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), Common Cottongrass (*E. angustifolium*) and mosses (including *Sphagnum compactum* and *Campylopus* spp.) are present in the wet channels or hollows, along with the insectivorous plants, Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. anglica*) and Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris* and *P. lusitanica*). Other typical microhabitats of blanket bog occur, including peaty pools which are colonised by Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*) and the bog moss *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, and quaking *Sphagnum* lawns colonised by species such as Bog-sedge (*Carex limosa*).

Upslope, the peat layer becomes generally thinner and the vegetation becomes more heathy. Heather becomes more abundant and some good stands of mature heather are present, with a deep bryophyte understorey. The tiny orchid, Lesser Twayblade (*Listera cordata*), occurs under Heather here: this species is rather local in its occurrence. Scarce species of liverwort (*Lophozia sudetica*) and the lichen *Cladonia arbuscula* occur here also. Typical heath vegetation covers the upper slopes and fringes the cliff-tops along the coast. Along with Heather, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) are abundant. Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*), species characteristic of alpine heath, are also present. In places, heath vegetation forms a mosaic with acid grassland, characterised by abundant Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Viviparous Fescue (*Festuca vivipara*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*). Towards the coast, the maritime influence is evident in the presence of species such as Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and Sea Plantain (*P. maritima*) in heath and grassland communities.

The site includes a number of oligotrophic lakes, lying mostly above 100 – 200 m, and these support a range of aquatic plant species, such as Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alternifolium*) and Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*). In addition, the rare and protected aquatic fern Pillwort (*Pillularia globulifera*) has been recorded from one of the lakes.

Fringing the northern side of Slieve Tooley are impressive cliffs which are colonised by vegetation, including Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*), Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*) and the scarce species Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*). At Maghera, a sand dune system juts into Loughros Beg Bay. The younger, more mobile dunes are colonised by Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), with occasional Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) and Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*). Stabilised dunes support a more species-rich vegetation with abundant legume species (Leguminosae) and a scarce subspecies of Creeping Willow (*Salix repens* subsp. *argentea*). Fixed dune habitat comprises approximately 52% of the total sand dune habitat at Maghera. The site is one of the few highly acidic/decalcified dune systems in the country so the habitat occurs in a complex mosaic with dune heath. The abundance of *Peltigera* and *Cladonia* lichens is further evidence of the calcium poor status of the substrate. The site is notable for the extensive and well-developed areas of dune heath, with such species as Heather and Crowberry growing on the sandy soils. Saltmarsh has developed on shallow shores in sheltered coastal locations. Typical species include Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*), Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) and Saltmarsh Rush (*J. gerardi*).

The cliffs and rocky islets in this site, in particular Tormore Island, provide important breeding habitat for seabirds, including Kittiwake, Razorbill, Guillemot, Fulmar and Puffin. Chough, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, also breed on the cliffs, with up to 13 pairs present in 1992. Merlin, as well as several pairs of Peregrine breed on the site, while Golden Plover may breed in small numbers on the bogs and heath. All three of these species are also listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds

Directive. Another species which utilises blanket bog on the site is Red Grouse, while Ring Ouzel visit some lakes in summer.

Grey Seal, a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, breed in sea caves in this site. The breeding population is estimated at 868-1116 individuals (in 2005). A one-off moult count in 2007 gave a figure of 92 seals. Otter, also an Annex II species, occurs throughout much of the site. In 2000 a population of the rare snail *Vertigo angustior* was discovered in the sand dunes at Glen Bay. This is one of only two known sites in Donegal for this mollusc, which is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

This large site is of major ecological significance for its range of good quality coastal and terrestrial habitats. Intact blanket bog is an increasingly rare habitat type and is recognised as such in having priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. This site contains some good examples of this habitat, with typical features and a representative flora. A lot of the habitat, however, is suffering from the effects of over-grazing by sheep. On higher slopes, the bog forms an interesting mosaic with upland heath and grassland communities, in which a number of scarce species of lower plant occur. The coastal habitats in the site are also intact and of good quality, and provide important habitat for breeding birds and seals, as well as the rare whorl snail.