

Site Name: Barrigone SAC

Site Code: 000432

Barrigone is situated approximately 5 km west of Askeaton, Co. Limerick. The site comprises an area of dry, species-rich, calcareous grassland and patches of scrub on a gentle, north-east-facing slope. The underlying limestone outcrops occasionally, and the proximity of the site to the Shannon Estuary adds a maritime influence.

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):

[5130] Juniper Scrub
[6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland*
[8240] Limestone Pavement*
[1065] Marsh Fritillary (<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>)

The open calcareous grassland supports an impressive range of plant species. Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Violets (*Viola* spp.) are present, while Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) is abundant and scattered throughout the grassland. The maritime influence is evident through the presence in the sward of Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*). The orchid flora is particularly well-developed and diverse, with eight species recorded on recent visits. These include Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and the scarce Irish Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*).

A range of scrub types are present, including a dense stand of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) towards the south, and a small area dominated by Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) in the north. Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) also form scrub patches, and these tend to be less species-rich.

Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*), a species protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999, occurs at Barrigone. The site also holds a large population of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*), a species listed under Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The primary threat to this site is quarrying. Grazing is also an important factor; over-grazing would cause damage to the vegetation, while under-grazing would allow scrub encroachment at the expense of grassland species which require more open

conditions. A balance between scrub and grassland is also important for invertebrate species.

A number of factors, including substrate, bedrock, microclimate and maritime influence, contribute to the floristic richness at Barrigone and hence to the ecological interest of this site. The presence of rare species of plant and invertebrate highlight the site's conservation value.