

Site Name: Lackan Saltmarsh and Kilcummin Head SAC

Site Code: 000516

Lackan Saltmarsh and Kilcummin Head are located at Lackan Bay, 8 km north-east of Killala, in Co. Mayo. Within this scenic and quite undisturbed area, there is an excellent diversity of coastal habitats including mature dunes, saltmarsh, rocky sea cliffs, dune grassland and estuarine sandflats. These areas provide a haven for many species of plant and animal. In addition to its value to wildlife, this area is also of historical significance, in that French soldiers landed near here during the 1798 Rising.

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):

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| [1310] <i>Salicornia</i> Mud |
| [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows |
| [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows |
| [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes) |
| [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)* |

An extensive area of fixed sand dunes, dune grassland and dry grassland on Kilcummin headland supports a good diversity of grasses and herbs such as Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Patches of the parasitic plant, Dodder (*Cuscuta epithimum*), occur in these habitats, and also Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*), Field Gentian (*Gentianella campestris*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). The maritime influence is shown by the presence in the sward of Sea Pansy (*Viola tricolor*). Small areas of Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dunes also occur.

Within Lackan Bay estuary, and along the margins of the Cloonalaghan River, sediments originating from the river have built up to form an extensive saltmarsh. The vegetation is comprised of a closely-cropped turf of Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*), Sea Milkwort (*Glauca maritima*) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), with prostrate forms of glasswort (*Salicornia* sp.) and Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardi*). Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) occurs on slightly elevated sites and its sharp stems protect two succulent plants, Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*). Shallow pools or pans occur on the surface.

West of the Cloonalaghan River, the vegetation is taller and more luxuriant. Freshwater streams flow down from the hillside, occupying ditches amid the grassland. Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) are present in the ditches. Sea Rush is dominant in the sward, along with the grasses Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*). There is a good selection of other plants scattered through this stand, reflecting both the fresh- and salt-water influences. These include spurrey (*Spergularia* sp.), Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*).

The rich flora of grassland and dunes supports a great diversity of butterflies and other insects. The butterflies noted here include the Six-spotted Burnet Moth, Cinnabar Moth, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Dark-green Fritillary and Common Blue.

The rocky sea-cliffs at Kilcummin Head are formed from marine sandstones and carbonate rocks with interesting sedimentary structures and trace fossils.

Both Lackan Bay and the estuary are important sites for wintering waterfowl and support part of the large populations which winter in Killala Bay. Lapwing, Golden Plover, Redshank, Dunlin, Wigeon, Snipe, Teal, Mallard and Curlew are known to frequent the site. Up to 2,200 Golden Plover have been seen in early winter roosting and feeding on this site. This species is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Both Little Tern and Common Tern have nested here in the past.

This coastal site is of considerable ecological importance for the range, quality and floristic richness of its coastal habitats, in particular the fixed dunes which are a priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.