



Site Name: Helvick Head SAC

Site Code: 000665

Helvick Head is situated on the southern side of Dungarvan Harbour in Co. Waterford. It forms the eastern extremity of a broad Old Red Sandstone ridge which extends as far west as Cork City, and is the most northern of the (Hercynian) parallel folds in the rocks of the south-west of Ireland. The beds of rock dip quite steeply at this point so that the cliffs, which rise to about 60 m, are formed of a series of semi-vertical ribs with small gullies between them, especially at the eastern end. The site extends from Helvick Head south-westward to include Muggort's Bay and comprises sea cliffs, cliff top vegetation and an area of marine waters off Helvick Head.

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 [4030] Dry Heath

The cliff top supports coastal heath of a type characteristic of shallow soils on acid rocks. Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) are the most common species. Associated species include Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), English Stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*), Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) and a variety of bryophyte and lichen species. Common grass species are Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*). The presence of Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) is indicative of the southern location of the site.

Where heath has returned to formerly-reclaimed fields, Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) occur more commonly. Coastal grassland with Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Creeping Bent (*A. stolonifera*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*), Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), amongst others, also occurs in places on the cliff top, where heath has not developed.

Sea cliffs are particularly well developed at the eastern end of the site and are well vegetated with Thrift, Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Buck's-horn Plantain, lichens, and a variety of other species.

Helvick Head has important breeding seabird populations. A census in 1999 recorded the following: Fulmar 42 pairs, Shag 6 pairs, Herring Gull 44 pairs, Great Black-backed Gull 2 pairs, Kittiwake 934 pairs, Guillemot 990 individuals and Razorbill 41 individuals. In April 1998, 10 individual Black Guillemots were recorded. The population of Kittiwakes is of national importance. The site also supports Chough, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The low heath vegetation on the cliff tops provides good foraging habitat for Chough and in 1992 a breeding pair was recorded, as well as three flock birds. Another Annex I species, Peregrine, also occurs at the site. Raven breed on the cliffs and there is a cliff-nesting colony of House Martins. Other species which breed within the site include Rock Pipit and Stonechat. The seabird colony at Helvick Head has been monitored at intervals since the Operation Seafarer project in 1969/70. In addition, more detailed population studies have been carried out on the Kittiwake colony.

Helvick Head is a site of considerable conservation importance, including good examples of coastal dry heath and vegetated sea cliffs, both habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is also of high ornithological importance, with one seabird species having a population of national importance. The presence of breeding Chough and Peregrine is also of note.