

**Site Name: Tramore Dunes and Backstrand SAC**

**Site Code: 000671**

This composite coastal site lies at the head of Tramore Bay, east of Tramore town in Co. Waterford. The Tramore dunes (Burrow) are the result of a classic inshore process - the growth of a spit of shingle and sand across a shallow bay. Behind the spit lies the Back Strand which dries out at low tide and is connected to the open sea by narrows at Rinneshark. The Burrow has a narrow neck and expands eastwards. Longshore drift is from the west so any loose material accumulates at the tip, which is hooked, and on the opposing spit at Bass Point.

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):

- [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
- [1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines
- [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
- [1310] *Salicornia* Mud
- [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows
- [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows
- [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)\*

The dunes at this site are well developed and contain several important habitats including the priority habitat fixed dunes. Within the dune system there are high ridges and valleys, old stabilised surfaces and new foredunes at shore level. Consequently all the major vegetation types are found, from the strand flora, through mobile embryonic and marram dunes to stable fixed dunes, with saltmarsh on the northern fringe and slacks at Bass Point.

The flora of the fixed dunes is not as species-rich as at other systems, due mainly to the absence of grazing. This has led to the development of a tall, rank dune grassland and in places the development of dune scrub. Nevertheless, most of the characteristic dune species of the south-east are found, including Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), which is dominant over much of the system, Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Rest Harrow (*Ononis repens*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*). The moss *Tortula ruraliformis*, which is characteristic of fixed dune areas, is common in the dune turf. In some areas there is a shrubby community, with Wild Privet

(*Ligustrum vulgare*) and Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*) being dominant. Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), a Red Data Book species, has been recorded recently from the fixed dune grassland, and there are isolated patches of Wild Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis* subsp. *prostratus*), a species which is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

The embryonic dunes at the site occur in mosaic with mobile Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dunes. They form a narrow band along the seaward face of Tramore Burrow and make up a small area at Bass Point. At Tramore Burrow they become more developed towards the tip, away from much of the recreational pressure. While Sand Couch (*Elymus farctus*) is a characteristic species for this habitat, Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*) and Marram also occur. Mobile marram dunes are present for most of the length of Tramore strand and also at Bass Point. They are particularly well represented at the tip of Tramore Burrow sand spit. Dune ridges can reach heights of around 25 m. The flora includes Sea-holly, Sea Bindweed, Colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*), Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) and Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*).

Saltmarsh is well developed and fairly extensive in the sheltered inner part of the site. It is the lagoon type of saltmarsh, the rarest type found in Ireland. The communities found are characteristic of both Atlantic and Mediterranean saltmarshes. The main species include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Lax-flowered Sea-lavender (*Limonium humile*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Sea Aster (*Aster trifolium*), Sea Purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*) and Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*). The scarce species Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) occurs, and a feature of this saltmarsh is the presence of Golden Samphire (*Inula crithmoides*), a species rarely found on saltmarshes in Ireland. Glassworts (*Salicornia* spp.) and other annuals such as Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) occur in channels and pans, and also onto the mudflats. Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*) is frequent on parts of the saltmarshes and on the mudflats.

The intertidal mudflats and sandflats are another important habitat type found here. The macrofauna is well developed, with lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), furrow shell (*Scrobicularia plana*), ragworm (*Hediste diversicolor*) and common cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) being common, and large patches of mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) and periwinkles (*Littorina littorea*) also present. A feature of this habitat is the presence of Eelgrass (*Zostera noltii* and *Z. angustifolia*).

The habitat type 'annual vegetation of driftlines' is represented at the site and the following strandline species occur: Sea Rocket, Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), oraches (*Atriplex* spp.), Sea-holly and Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*). The rare species Sea Knotgrass (*Polygonum maritimum*) has been recorded from this habitat.

The beaches at the site are sandy shingle in character and species characteristic of this habitat type, such as Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) and Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*), are common. Species which have been recorded from this site and which

are characteristic, but rare or scarce, include Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*), Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*), Sea Knotgrass and Cottonweed (*Otanthus maritimus*).

Several rare plants have been recorded from Tramore, and some have already been mentioned above. It is the only site in the country where the Red Data Book plant Sea Knotgrass is known, though it is sporadic in appearance. Other Red Data Book species which have been reported include Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*) and Cottonweed (both of which are listed on the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999), Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*), Sea-kale and Spring Vetch (*Vicia lathyroides*).

The Back Strand is an area of great importance for waterfowl on the south coast and is a designated SPA. The following figures are the average counts obtained during three seasons between 1994/95 and 1996/97. Brent Goose (482) occur in numbers which are of international significance. Six further species occur in nationally important numbers: Golden Plover (3,100), Grey Plover (261), Dunlin (1,970), Sanderling (53), Black-tailed Godwit (271) and Bar-tailed Godwit (405). Both Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

The main threat to the stability of the dune habitats is from recreational pressures, with heavy usage of the site due to its proximity to Tramore, a popular holiday town. Already some large blow-outs and areas of bare sand are present. Driftline and shingle vegetation is also under pressure from heavy usage of the beach area. The intertidal and saltmarsh habitats are not under significant threat, though possible seepage from the nearby landfill site is a potential threat.

Tramore Dunes and Back Strand is a site of major ecological importance for the range of good quality coastal habitats which occur, including fixed dunes, which are listed as a priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The site has a remarkably rich flora, featuring a number of rare and protected species, and the intertidal area is important for wintering waterfowl.