

**Site Name: Barley Cove to Ballyrisode Point SAC**

**Site Code: 001040**

This site is situated on the Mizen Head peninsula in the extreme south-west of Co. Cork. It straddles a 10 km stretch of coastline from the Barley Cove inlet to Ballyrisode Point at Toormore Bay. The rock type is Old Red Sandstone, and this displays a north-east/south-west folding which is especially visible at Crookhaven and Brow 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):

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| [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats               |
| [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks        |
| [1310] <i>Salicornia</i> Mud                      |
| [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows                      |
| [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows                 |
| [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)                 |
| [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*                  |
| [4030] Dry Heath                                  |
| [1395] Petalwort ( <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> ) |

While rocky heath is the dominant habitat, the site is most important for the sand dunes and related habitats which occur at Barley Cove. A fine gradation of habitat is shown, from the outer sandy beach, through dunes and saltmarshes, and then brackish lagoon. Of particular importance is the fixed dune habitat, and this is one of the few examples of this habitat type in Co. Cork and south Co. Kerry.

The dune system at Barley Cove is of moderate size and relatively intact. It grades from an outer ridge of white Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dunes, through fixed dune hills and into an extensive area of dune grassland. A characteristic flora is displayed, with species such as Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*). The moss and lichen component is well developed in places and includes *Tortula ruraliformis* and *Peltigera canina*. The rare bryophyte Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralfsii*), which is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, has been recorded in this dune system. Long-term erosion by the tidal river has reduced the size of the dune system, though sand has been deposited elsewhere in the area.

The dunes merge with a substantial area of saltmarsh which displays characters of both Atlantic and Mediterranean salt meadows. Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) is a dominant species, while other saltmarsh species include Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*). A fringe of glasswort (*Salicornia* spp.) occurs at the lowermost part of the saltmarsh and above the tidal river.

Lissagriffin Lake, while of artificial origin, displays characteristics of a brackish lagoon, with such species as Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) and Tasselweed (*Ruppia* sp.). Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) occurs along the eastern and northern margins of the lagoon.

Fine sandy beaches, with associated intertidal sandflats, occur at Barley Cove and White Strand. The intertidal flats at White Strand are well sheltered and have a typical invertebrate macrofauna. Molluscs are well represented in the mid shore zone, including the Common Cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) and the Thin Tellin (*Tellina tenuis*). The low shore is characterised by an abundance of polychaetes, especially the Sand Mason (*Lanice conchilega*). The razorshells *Ensis arcuatus* and *Solen marginatus* are also typical low shore species, as is the Sand Gaper (*Mya arenaria*).

The site has extensive lengths of rocky shoreline, which develop into low cliffs in places. Shingle, another important type of coastal habitat, occurs mostly in sheltered coves. At one location Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*), a Red Data Book species, occurs commonly on the shingle.

The dominant habitat over much of the remainder of the site is coastal heath, which is of high conservation value. This occurs from the maritime shoreline to the highest point of the site (164 m). It is varied in character, ranging from shallow dry soils to wet peaty pockets. The heath is primarily made up of woody species, including Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) is ubiquitous, with other character species such as Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) and Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*).

A notable feature of the site is the concentration of rare plants associated with the heath habitat. There are three species which are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999: Hairy Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus subbiflorus*), Pale Dog-violet (*Viola lactea*) and Lanceolate Spleenwort (*Asplenium billotii*); and three Red Data Book species: Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*), Bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) and Spotted Rock-rose (*Tuberaria guttata*), occur in places. A further scarce plant which occurs at the site is the Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*).

The site is of notable ornithological importance for Chough (listed on Annex I of E.U. Birds Directive), with 9 breeding pairs in 1992. In addition to nesting, substantial numbers of Choughs utilise the heath and sandy habitats for feeding and socialising. Lissagriffin Lake is of some local importance for wintering waterfowl, including Whooper Swans (up to 16 at times) and Mute Swans (up to 40). Small numbers of

seabirds breed on the cliffs, including Fulmar (41 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (9 pairs), Herring Gull (133 pairs), Shag (39 pairs), and Black Guillemot (1-5 pairs) (all counts in 1985).

The main land uses at this site are grazing and tourism related activities. Most of the site is grazed by livestock, though not intensively. Rabbits, however, are frequent at the sand dunes and have caused serious damage. The beach and dunes at Barley Cove are utilised by day-trippers and campers during the summer months and parts of the dune system has been damaged by heavy usage.

This site is of conservation importance for the presence of a number of good examples of coastal habitats. Of particular significance are the areas of dry heath and fixed dune (the latter, a priority habitat listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive). The concentration of rare plants is of special note, as is the high density of Choughs.