

**Site Name: Ballyness Bay SAC**

**Site Code: 001090**

Ballyness Bay is situated in north-west Donegal adjacent to the towns of Gortahork and Falcarragh. The underlying geology is mostly pelites, with some smaller areas of limestone and quartzite. This is mostly covered by windblown sand and peat. Ballyness Bay is a large and very shallow estuarine complex, with extensive areas of sandflats which are exposed at low tide.

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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| [1130] Estuaries                                     |
| [1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats                  |
| [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes                      |
| [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)                    |
| [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*                     |
| [2190] Humid Dune Slacks                             |
| [1013] Geyer's Whorl Snail ( <i>Vertigo geyeri</i> ) |

The intertidal sandflats of Ballyness Bay often have a rich macro-invertebrate fauna, with notable populations of Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*) and Common Cockle (*Cardium edule*). Eelgrass (*Zostera* sp.) is also present. The bay is almost completely cut off from the open sea by two large sand dune covered spits. The Dooley sand dunes are highly dynamic and have grown to a considerable height near the tip of the spit - they contain what is probably the largest unvegetated sand dune in the country. The succession of vegetation types across the spit and the topographical features make this area of special interest.

Of particular importance are the fixed dunes which occur along the length of the Dooley sand spit. They are found east of a large band of mobile Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) dunes. There are some good species-rich areas, which include Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor* subsp. *curtisii*), Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*). There is also a good variety of moss and lichen species, including *Tortula ruraliformis*, *Brachythecium albicans*, *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, *Homalothecium lutescens* and *Peltigera canina*.

Dunes dominated by Marram are well developed. Also occurring are embryonic dunes, with species such as Lyme Grass (*Leymus arenarius*), Sea Couch (*Elymus farctus*) and Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*).

The dunes at Drumatinny, by contrast, are quite low but also have areas of fixed dune as well as sandy, machair-type grassland. Humid dune slacks, with species such as Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) and Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), are scattered through the dunes at Drumatinny. Areas of saltmarsh, dry and wet grassland and heath add further diversity to the site.

The rare whorl snail *Vertigo geyeri*, a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, is found at this site.

This site is important for waterfowl. Species counts (all average peaks over 4 seasons, 1994/95 to 1996/97) include Ringed Plover (110), Brent Goose (85), Red-breasted Merganser (12), Wigeon (47), Oystercatcher (87), Curlew (55), Sanderling (47) and Greenshank (7). The populations of Ringed Plover and Sanderling are of national importance. Also occurring is Golden Plover (165, same count period), a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Large numbers of Lapwing have been noted sheltering during stormy weather in dune slacks near Drumatinny. Chough, another species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, have been noted feeding near Binavea Strand.

Land use within the bay comprises fishing and sailing on a small scale; the surrounding dunes and grassland are grazed by sheep and cattle.

Ballyness Bay contains several important coastal habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, including the priority habitat fixed dunes. The site is also an important wildfowl site.