



Site Name: Dog's Bay SAC

Site Code: 001257

Dog's Bay is located 3.5 km south-west of Roundstone village in Co. Galway. The site includes a granite 'island' which is linked to the mainland by a sandy spit, a feature which is known as a tombolo. Dog's Bay curves along the west side of this tombolo, with Gorteen Bay to the east. The sands are formed of Foraminifera shells, the calcareous remains of tiny, single-celled marine animals. These Foraminifera have been swept up from deeper water into the channel between the island and the mainland, where they have accumulated to form the tombolo, which, as a result, is comprised of 90% calcium carbonate.

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):

[1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines
[2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
[2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
[2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*
[4030] Dry Heath

At Dog's Bay SAC, fixed dune vegetation occurs as a relatively narrow strip between the mainland and the small island. Given the amount of ongoing erosion here, the fixed dune is likely to be a remnant of a once larger system. The main plant species present include Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*P. coronopus*), Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Spreading Meadow-grass (*Poa subcaerulea*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and the moss *Brachythecium albicans*. Locally uncommon species that have been recorded from this habitat include Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria albicans*) and Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*).

The other sand dune habitats at the site are more typical of embryonic shifting dunes and Marram dunes, and these occur along both sides of the Dog's Bay promontory. Although the habitat stretches for some considerable length (up to 300 m), the width rarely exceeds 25 m and there are considerable amounts of bare sand present. Common species include Sand Couch (*Elymus farctus*), Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), Red Fescue, Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Sand Sedge.

Associated with the embryonic dunes is annual drift line vegetation. This habitat is best developed on the shore along the south-eastern facing side of the site, although there are also small areas of this habitat type along the sandy shore on the Gorteen Bay side. The vegetation is typically species-poor, and common plants present include Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) and Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*).

Substantial areas of dry heath occur on the rocky headland in the south-west of the site, where the habitat forms a mosaic with rock outcrops and grassland. Prominent species in the vegetation include Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*). Unusually the heath vegetation also contains the maritime plant species Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*).

The diversity of this site is added to by the presence of wetland areas, including brackish pools and a freshwater marsh.

The main threats posed to this coastal system are over-grazing by domestic livestock and rabbits, and intensive visitor pressure during the summer. These activities are exacerbating the natural dune erosion, which is especially severe on the west side of the tombolo. Careful management is required to maintain the conservation interest and amenity value of the site.

Dog's Bay is an important site as it provides a fine example of a tombolo. The Foraminifera sand is also of great interest, this being one of the few beaches worldwide where Foraminifera sand is found onshore. The coastal habitats are of conservation importance, notably the fixed dune vegetation which is a priority habitat on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.