



**Site Name: Kilpatrick Sandhills SAC**

**Site Code: 001742**

Kilpatrick Sandhills are located about 8 km south of Arklow town, and just south of the Wicklow/Wexford county boundary. The site is comprised of a mosaic of coastal habitats but primarily a mature sand dune system which extends along 2 km of coastline.

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)\*
- [2150] Decalcified Dune Heath\*

Various stages of sand dune formation can be seen at this site, from small fore dunes which are stabilized by Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), to mature fixed dunes colonised by a species-rich sward of grasses and herbaceous plants.

Embryonic shifting fore dunes occur mainly along the middle and southern sections of the site. Species such as Marram, Sand Couch (*Elymus farctus*) and Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) are present. The Marram dunes are dominated by Marram, with species such as Sea Spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*) and Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) also found.

In the fixed dunes Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) is the dominant grass. Other species present include Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*). On the older dunes, there is an abundance of legumes, including Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Hop Trefoil (*Trifolium campestre*) and Lesser Trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*). Further inland, on the more mature grey dunes, Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) is common. The scarce species Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus*) occurs among the vegetation of the more mobile dunes.

Dune heath occurs behind the fixed dunes in the mid and southern sections of the site. This is a very rare vegetation type in Ireland. The heathy scrub is dominated by Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), and other species recorded in this area include Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Common

Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), Burnet Rose, Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Bramble.

On the landward side of the dunes, in the middle of the site, there is a low-lying marsh which is dominated by Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), with Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*) and sedges (*Carex* spp.). To the west of the marsh is an area of wet scrub woodland. The canopy is formed of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and willows (*Salix* spp.), with Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Great Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*), Wood Dock (*Rumex sanguineus*) and Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) among the ground flora.

At the northern end of the site is a rocky headland, Kilmichael Point, which affords fine views along the coastline. Rock outcrops occur where the overlying clay drift has eroded, exposing cliffs which rise in steps to about 10 m. The headland supports a species-rich coastal grassland and cliff vegetation, including the scarce species, Rock Sea-lavender (*Limonium binervosum*).

The Red Data Book species, Sea Stock (*Matthiola sinuata*), has been observed among rocky crevices here in the past, but has not been recorded recently. The species is now thought to be extinct in Ireland.

At the southern end of the site, the sand dunes and beach are used by visitors for amenity purposes. Parts of the site are also used for grazing cattle. Grazing is a critical factor in coastal systems: the correct grazing pressure maintains species-rich open swards and curtails scrub encroachment. Over-exposure to grazing and amenity usage can cause damage to dune vegetation and exacerbate dune erosion.

The site is ecologically important as a good example of a mature and fairly intact sand dune system which shows the developmental stages of dunes from fore dunes to mature grey dunes. A good diversity of habitats and species are present. Fixed dunes and dune heath are priority habitats under Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.