

Site Name: Magherabeg Dunes SAC

Site Code: 001766

Magherabeg Dunes SAC is a sand dune system situated at Ardmore Point, about 5 km south of Wicklow Head in Co. Wicklow. The Three Mile Water River enters the sea through the dunes. The site is fairly intact, though some areas are being naturally eroded by wind and sea, in particular at the southern end, where bedrock has been exposed.

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)*
[7220] Petrifying Springs*

Despite its small size, the dune system at Magherabeg shows most of the developmental stages, with embryonic dunes, white dunes and grey fixed all represented. The embryo dunes occur mainly in the northern sector, in association with a good example of drift line vegetation. Species present include Sea Couch (*Elymus farctus*), Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) and Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*). A narrow band of shifting marram dunes then occur, these having been largely washed away by erosion in the southern sector. Stable fixed dunes are well represented, with such species as Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and White Clover (*Trifolium repens*). Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) is present on the older fixed dunes, with species such as Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) also present. The dune system is backed by drift banks, which are well covered by deciduous woodland and scrub. Other species occurring on these drift banks include Hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and the scarce species Wood Vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*).

Along the low cliffs at Ardmore Point a line of petrifying springs with tufa formations occurs, and a range of specialised moss species are found.

The Three Mile Water River, which flows through the dunes provides habitat for wetland species such as sedges, including Bladder Sedge (*Carex vesicaria*), Fox Sedge

(*C. otrubae*) and Grey Sedge (*C. divulsa*). The very rare hybrid sedge, *Carex* x *grossii* (*C. hirta* x *C. vesicaria*) has also been recorded here. Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is also found along the river.

The site is of conservation importance because it is a fine example of a dune system which is fairly intact and which has a well-developed flora. The lack of easy public access to this site has undoubtedly helped in preventing damage and erosion from amenity activities. The presence of wetland vegetation on the site is of additional interest.