

**Site Name: Ballyhoorisky Point to Fanad Head SAC**

**Site Code: 001975**

This large coastal site lies approximately 20 km north of Millford in north Donegal. The coastline consists of a series of bays, with rocky headlands and steep cliffs at the east end. The underlying geology is predominantly granodiorite, a basic igneous rock. The east-facing coast is of quartzite and is exposed as a rocky shore and low cliffs. Large quantities of windblown sand dominate the northern section of the site.

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):

- [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
- [1230] Vegetated Sea Cliffs
- [3130] Oligotrophic to Mesotrophic Standing Waters
- [3140] Hard Water Lakes
- [1014] Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*)
- [1833] Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*)

Vegetated sea-cliffs are well represented at the site and are best developed to the south of Fanad Head where they reach a maximum height of 120 m. Species such as Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and the scarce Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) occur. The Red Data Book species Scots Lovage (*Ligusticum scoticum*) has been recently reported from sea cliffs at the site.

Shingle beaches are also a feature of this site. These are best developed in the various small sheltered bays, especially between Ballyhoorisky Point and Rinbooy Point, and also along the stretch of coastline between Rinmore and Currin Point. The vegetation of the habitat within the site is typically sparse due to the exposed and highly mobile nature of much of the substrate. Species such as Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) occur.

The machair grassland which is found within the site is characterised by its sandy substrate and gently undulating topography. The predominant grasses are Red Fescue, Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*). A wide variety of flowering herbs are also present, including Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) and Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*). Low-lying wet areas occur where the sandy soils have eroded down to below the water

table. These marshy areas are characterised by Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*). Much of the machair is in a degraded state due to over-grazing and amenity pressure.

Lakes are also well represented and include some of the best examples of base-rich, nutrient-poor lakes in the county. Shannagh Lough is an important, though small, example of an oligotrophic lake in an extreme northern location. It is situated approximately 1 km from the coast and is almost entirely enclosed by rocky ground. The lake is locally heavily vegetated, with such oligotrophic species as Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), Quillwort (*Isoetes lacustris*), Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alterniflorum*), the pondweeds *Potamogeton perfoliatus* and *P. berchtoldii*, and a diversity of stoneworts (*Chara aspera*, *C. virgata*, *Nitella flexilis* and *N. translucens*). Of particular note is that Shannagh is the type site for the little known *Nitella spanioclema*, which is probably endemic. Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*), a species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, is also present.

Two other lakes within this site, Kinny Lough and Magheradrumman Lough, are good examples of hard water lakes with *Chara* formations. Kinny Lough is a medium sized lake separated from the sea by a machair plain and dune system. Magheradrumman Lough is a small lake with sandy shores and a sandy bottom. A wide variety of plant communities occur in these lakes, with both soft and hard water species present. *Chara* communities are well developed, with *Chara aspera*, *C. contraria*, *C. desmacantha*, *Chara rudis*, *C. globularis*, plus *Nitella flexilis* and *N. translucens*. Also present are the moss *Fontinalis antipyretica*, Shoreweed, both Spiked and Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*, *M. alterniflorum*), Autumnal Water-starwort (*Callitriche hermaphrodita*), Lesser Water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*), and a range of pondweeds (*Potamogeton praelongus*, *P. crispus* and *P. filiformis*).

This site contains many other coastal habitats including sandy beaches with drift line vegetation, sand dunes, wetlands, coastal heath and open marine water, the latter included in the site for its ornithological interest.

A number of rare and threatened Red Data Book plant species have been recorded from the site: Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*), Scots Lovage, and from lakes in the site, Pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*) and Slender Naiad. The latter two species are legally protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015.

A population of the rare whorl snail, *Vertigo angustior*, has recently been discovered within the site at Kinlackagh Bay. This is associated with a shallow stream valley within dunes. *Vertigo angustior* is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The site is of ornithological importance for waterfowl, with nationally important numbers of Sanderling, Eider and Long-tailed Duck, as well as good numbers of Oystercatcer, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Peregrine Falcon and Chough both breed within the site; these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

The site is also used by Otter, Frog and Irish Hare, each of which is listed in the Red Data Book.

The site is grazed by both sheep and cattle and this, coupled with fencing off of certain areas and heavy use of fertilizers, has caused damage to some parts of the site.

This site is of ecological and conservation importance for the occurrence of examples of four habitat types that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, the presence of Red Data Book plants species, including one listed on Annex II of this Directive, the presence of a population of *Vertigo angustior*, and for the large populations of several bird species that use it.