

Site Name: Ardmore Head SAC

Site Code: 002123

This site is situated on a small headland to the east of the village of Ardmore on the west Waterford coastline. The site consists of sea cliffs and associated coastal habitats. The cliffs, which form part of the Ardmore Syncline, are of moderate height (up to 40 m), continuous and precipitous. They are also well indented, and have numerous small ledges which support breeding seabirds. The aspect of the cliffs is mostly east and south facing, but there is a small section facing north.

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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| [1230] Vegetated Sea Cliffs [4030] Dry Heath |
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Cliff vegetation consists of sea-spurrey (*Spergularia* spp.), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and scurvygrass (*Cochlearia* spp.). Other flora includes Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*). In places below the cliffs there are boulder and some shingle shorelines. Small rocky islets, which are continuously washed over, also occur. An area of open marine water is included within the site, partly to give some protection to the seabirds which nest on the ledges above.

The dominant habitat within the site is dry coastal heath (which is best viewed west of Ram's Head). Species present include an abundance of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), with Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and bent grasses (*Agrostis* spp.). In the eastern part of the site, the heath is dominated by Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) and grasses. The heath merges into the cliff vegetation but also into dry grassland, especially at Ardmore Head. Here the grassland vegetation is dominated by Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), bent grasses, Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*).

At the north of the site are small patches of scrub with species such as Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Bramble and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). The understorey consists of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) and Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*).

Six species of seabirds were recorded breeding on the ledges during a survey from 1985 to 1987. The most numerous bird is the Kittiwake. This species has declined somewhat in recent years (1989-1993), though approximately 800 pairs still nest, a population of national importance. Other species include Fulmar (38 pairs), Shag (6 pairs), Herring Gull (78 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (2 pairs), Razorbill (7 individuals) and Guillemot (6 individuals). The site is noted for the presence of Chough, with 1-2 pairs recorded. Chough is listed under Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Land use at the site consists of tourism/recreational activities. A path is located along the cliff for much of the site. In addition there is St. Declan's holy well and old ruined church at the north of the site. The grass around the church is mown regularly. Drift net fishing is carried out in the sea surrounding the site.

Although small, this site is of conservation value as it displays good examples of the type of sea cliff and dry heath characteristic of the south coast. Both of these habitats are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The breeding seabirds and Chough add to the ecological interest.