

**Site Name: Kenmare River SAC**

**Site Code: 002158**

Kenmare River SAC in Co. Kerry, is a long, narrow, south-west facing bay. It is a deep, drowned glacial valley and the bedrock is mainly Old Red Sandstone which forms reefs along the middle of the bay throughout its length. Exposure to prevailing winds and swells at the mouth diminishes towards the head of the bay. Numerous islands and inlets along the length of the bay provide further areas of additional shelter in which a variety of habitats and unusual communities occur.

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):

- [1160] Large Shallow Inlets and Bays
- [1170] Reefs
- [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
- [1230] Vegetated Sea Cliffs
- [1330] Atlantic Salt Meadows
- [1410] Mediterranean Salt Meadows
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)\*
- [4030] Dry Heath
- [5130] Juniper Scrub
- [6130] Calaminarian Grassland
- [8330] Sea Caves
  
- [1014] Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*)
- [1303] Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- [1365] Common (Harbour) Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Kenmare River SAC has a wide range of marine communities from exposed coast to ultra-sheltered areas. The site contains three marine habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, namely reefs, large shallow bay and marine caves. There is also a very high number of rare and notable marine species present and some uncommon communities. Kenmare River is the only known site in Ireland for the Northern Sea-fan (*Swiftia pallida*) and is the only known area where this species and the Southern Sea-fan (*Eunicella verrucosa*) co-occur.

In the more exposed areas within Kenmare River SAC the sublittoral sediment is composed mainly of coarse shelly sand and gravel forming small dunes frequently with sparse bivalves, including *Lutraria* sp. In sheltered areas the muddy sand has communities characterised by burrowing megafauna. Some areas have the Norwegian Prawn (*Nephrops norvegicus*) and others the burrowing sea cucumber *Neopentadactyla mixta*. Kenmare River SAC is one of only four known locations in Ireland for the burrowing anemone *Pachycerianthus multiplicatus*. Communities characterised by burrowing brittlestars including the uncommon *Ophiopsila annulosa* also occur. Red calcareous free living algae generally termed 'maerl' (also known as 'coral') occur in the sheltered bays and at one site the rare burrowing brittlestar *Amphiura securigera* occurs.

Beaches in outer parts of Kenmare River SAC are composed of coarse, mobile sand and have sand hoppers in the high shore and polychaete worms in the low shore. More sheltered coves, sometimes backed by sand dunes, have sandhoppers in the upper shore, Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*) in the mid shore and Razor Shell (*Ensis arcuatus*) and the burrowing sea-urchin *Echinocardium cordatum* in the lower shore.

Midway along the south coast of Kenmare River SAC, a series of sea caves stretch back into the cliff. They typically support encrusting sponges, ascidians and bryozoans.

At the mouth of the bay, Kenmare River SAC contains very good examples of littoral, infralittoral and circalittoral reef communities that are typically found in extremely exposed areas. The characteristic shifts that occur in community composition with depth are very strong. Likewise, the shifts that occur with exposure are well represented along the length of the bay.

Perennial vegetation of stony banks is well represented at two locations within Kenmare River SAC - Pallas Harbour and Rossdohan Island. Characteristic species recorded here include Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) and Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*).

Within the Derrynane Bay area on the south side of the Iveragh Peninsula there are good examples of a number of habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive including dry heath, fixed dunes, Marram dunes, sea cliffs and salt meadows (both Atlantic and Mediterranean types). Of particular note within the dry heath habitat here is the occurrence of the rare Red Data Book species, Kerry Lily (*Simethis planifolia*). This species, which is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015, is unknown as a native in Britain, and in Ireland it is restricted to the Kenmare River SAC area. Another protected plant, Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), is found on rocky knolls in the site. Several other locally uncommon plant species add to the importance of this area, for example, Chaffweed (*Anagallis minima*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) and Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*).

Salt meadows are well distributed in sheltered areas from Derrynane Bay to Kilmakilloge Harbour. Six of these have been surveyed in detail, and five are of the fringe type on peat. The saltmarsh at Derrynane is of the bay type and is found on mud on sand, and is associated with a sand dune system. Species which have been recorded from saltmarshes at this site include Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*), Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), oraches (*Atriplex* spp.), Thrift, Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*) and Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*).

Heath also occurs along the extensive coastal strips within the site, from sea level to the higher slopes. Dry heath is especially well represented, and occurs in association with wet heath, coastal grassland and exposed rock. Widespread species of the heath habitat are Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*). Also present are species such as Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). In places Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) and the protected Kerry Lily and Betony are components of the heath. Juniper scrub is found in at least three locations within the site: near Cappul Bridge, Ardgroom and at two stations opposite Black Rock, south-east of Cod's Head.

Sea cliffs occur in places along the length of the site and are often well vegetated, supporting plant species typical of the habitat, including Thrift, Sea Campion, Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Rock Samphire and Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*).

Excellent examples of Calaminarian grassland occur in association with old mine workings about Allihies. The habitat is particularly notable for the range of rare bryophytes that it supports.

Within this site fixed dune is largely confined to Derrynane where a small area occurs on the northern shores. The most common species include Red Fescue, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). The moss species *Homalothecium lutescens* can be locally abundant, while *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Hypnum cupressiforme* are also found.

A reasonably extensive area of white dune dominated by Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) occurs at the mouth of Derrynane bay. Species such as Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*), Ribwort Plantain, Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Red Fescue, Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), Portland Spurge (*Euphorbia portlandica*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) are also found here.

Kenmare River SAC holds an important population of Common Seal (maximum count of 391 in the all-Ireland survey of 2003). The seals frequent rocky islets near

Sneem, Templenoe and Castle Cove, as well as Brennel Island, Illaunsillagh, Kilmackilloge Harbour and Ballycrovane Harbour. Otter also uses the site. Both Common Seal and Otter are listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Two internationally important roosts for Lesser Horseshoe Bat, another Annex II species, are included in the site: approximately 100 bats were recorded hibernating in a souterrain near Dunkerron in 2001, while over 100 bats have been counted in recent summers in a two-storey cottage near Killaha. In damp slacks amongst the sand dunes at Derrynane, the rare Narrow-Mouthed Whorl Snail (*Vertigo angustior*), also an Annex II species, has been found. The nationally endangered and protected Red Data Book species, Natterjack Toad, has also been recorded from this area and, following a re-introduction programme, has re-established itself at the site.

Common/Arctic Tern (95+ pairs in 2008) have been recorded breeding on rocky islands in Derrynane Bay and on other islands within the site including Eyerics Island, Spanish Island and Brennel Island. In 1995 two pairs of the scarce Little Tern bred, and Sandwich Tern occasionally breed.

Impacts arising from aquaculture, fishing, dumping of wastes and water pollution are the principal threats to the nature conservation interests of Kenmare River. There are several resorts for water sports and a number of popular beaches within this large coastal site and impacts associated with such recreational activities may also pose a threat. Bait digging is also a potential threat in some areas. Housing developments within the areas of dry heath present another possible threat to the integrity of the site. The seals and bats may be vulnerable to disturbance. Grazing at Derrynane is managed for the conservation of the dune habitats and the rare species they contain.

Kenmare River SAC contains an exceptional complement of marine and terrestrial habitats, many of which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, as well as four species that are listed on Annex II of this Directive. The presence of populations of rare Red Data Book species, in particular of Kerry Lily, together with the ornithological interest of the area, adds to the conservation significance of the site.