

**Site Name: Bandon River SAC**

**Site Code: 002171**

The Bandon River SAC consists of relatively short adjoining stretches of the Bandon and Caha Rivers. These rivers flow in a southerly direction to the east of Dunmanway, Co. Cork. Towards the southern end of the site the Bandon River takes an easterly course. The predominant rock formations are Old Red Sandstone to the north and Carboniferous slate stretching south of Dunmanway. Soils in the northern section consist of peats, podzols and skeletal soils. The southern section consists of alluvial soils and Brown Podzolics.

The east-west exposure of Old Red Sandstone to the north of Dunmanway displays distinct ridgelines of bare rock with poor pasture and scrub. In this area around Lovers Leap the Bandon River cuts a narrow channel southwards, cascading over a series of rock steps through a narrow valley. Below this and above Long Bridge the river widens and meanders through a fertile floodplain. Immediately south of Long Bridge the reduced flow gradient and broad, flat valley permit the main channel to split and extend into a network of braided streams forming islands.

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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| [3260] Floating River Vegetation                                      |
| [91E0] Alluvial Forests*  |
| [1029] Freshwater Pearl Mussel ( <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i> ) |
| [1096] Brook Lamprey ( <i>Lampetra planeri</i> )                      |

Wet broadleaved semi-natural woodland is found in an undisturbed area of braided river channels and islands below Dunmanway. The river channels are well defined and the islands appear solid. Canopy dominants are Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), with scattered Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). There is a very sparse understorey composed of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and saplings of Hazel and Sessile Oak. Epiphytes are abundant on trees, including species such as Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and bryophytes such as *Isothecium myosuroides*. The ground flora is dominated by Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Ivy, along with Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*). Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), a very rare plant in Co. Cork, has been recorded from this woodland.

Floating river vegetation is found along the length of the river and is dominated by water-crowfoots (*Ranunculus* spp). Other aquatic plants found include Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alterniflorum*), Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*) and at least four water-starwort species (*Callitriche* spp.). Mosses present on rocks and attached to tree roots include *Fontinalis antipyretica* in slack flow areas, and *Fontinalis squamosa*, *Rhynchostegium riparioides* and *Amblystegium riparium* in moderate flows. The landward fringe of deep pools supports Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*). Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) and Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) are two species of local importance which are found in the river. In moderate current flow below the Long Bridge, the larger stones are covered by the moss *Brachythecium rivulare* and the liverwort *Chiloscyphus polyanthos* var. *polyanthos*. Boulders covered in *Nostoc* algae are probably of local occurrence in Ireland. The liverwort *Riccardia chamaedryfolia* and the moss *Fissidens crassipes* found under the Long Bridge are considered to be rare in Ireland.

Heath in mosaic with wet grassland, exposed rock, scrub and improved grassland covers up to 30% of the site north of Long Bridge. Typical heath plants growing in association with the rocks are abundant Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), stonecrops (*Sedum* spp.), small amounts of St Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*) and many lichen species.

Some small areas of woodland occur within the site north of Long Bridge. Tree species such as Sessile Oak, Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Downy Birch are found with an understorey of Holly, Hazel, Rowan and Rusty Willow.

Two Red Data Book plant species have been recorded in the past from within or close to the site - Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*), a species that grows on the roots of legumes, and Small-white Orchid (*Pseudorchis albida*), a species of upland pastures and heaths that is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

The river below Long Bridge is an important inland site in Cork for Mute Swan and approximately 20 individuals are present throughout the year along this stretch. Several hundred Snipe use the site during the winter. Other birds seen regularly within the site are Grey Heron, Cormorant and Mallard, while low numbers of Lapwing and Teal visit during the winter. The Kingfisher, listed under Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, breeds along the river.

A population of Freshwater Pearl Mussel is found in the river. This species is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The river also supports populations of protected fish species, notably Brook Lamprey and Salmon (*Salmo salar*), both of which are also listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The site also supports many of the mammal species occurring in Ireland. Those which are listed in the Irish Red Data Book include Badger, Irish Hare, Daubenton's Bat and Pipistrelle bat. The two bat species can be seen feeding along the river and roosting under the old bridges. Otter, another species listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, is also found within the site.

Land use at the site consists mainly of sheep grazing in the northern section and cattle grazing on improved grasslands below Lovers Leap and further south. In the area between Milleenanannig and Bealaboy Bridge land reclamation and drainage is taking place. In the area of exposed rock on the higher terrain above Ardcahan Bridge some land reclamation and forestry is carried out.

This site contains good examples of two habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive - alluvial forest and floating river vegetation - and supports populations of four Annex II species - Otter, Salmon, Brook Lamprey and Freshwater Pearl Mussel. The presence of a number of Red Data Book plant and animal species adds further interest to the site.