



**Site Name: Ireland's Eye SAC**

**Site Code: 002193**

Ireland's Eye is located about 1.5 km north of Howth in Co. Dublin. It is a Cambrian island with quartzite which forms spectacular cliffs on the north-east side. Elsewhere much of the area is covered by drift. There is a Martello tower at the west end of the island and an ancient ruined church in the middle.

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
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On Ireland's Eye the drift soils support a plant community of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and various grasses, especially Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), along with Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Navelwort (*Umbilicus rupestris*). The thinner soils have some interesting species, including Spring Squill (*Scilla verna*), Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*) and Field Mouse-ear (*Cerastium arvense*). Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) has also been recorded from here.

The cliff maritime flora includes Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*), Sea Stork's-bill (*Erodium maritimum*), Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*), Golden Samphire (*Inula crithmoides*), Rock Sea-lavender (*Limonium binervosum*), Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum minor*), Portland Spurge (*Euphorbia portlandica*) and Tree-mallow (*Lavatera arborea*).

A small area of shingle vegetation occurs above the sandy beach at Carrigeen Bay on the western side of the island. Species such as Curled Dock (*Rumex crispus*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostrata*) occur, while the rare Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*), a characteristic species of this habitat, has been known from this site since 1894 and was recorded as recently as 1981. Sea-kale is listed as threatened in the Irish Red Data Book. Also occurring on the sandy/shingle beach is the Red Data Book species Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*).

Ireland's Eye is of national importance for breeding seabirds. In 1999 the following were counted: Fulmar - 70 pairs; Cormorant - 306 pairs; Shag - 32 pairs; Lesser Black-backed Gull - 1 pair; Herring Gull – approx. 250 pairs; Great Black-backed Gull – approx. 100 pairs; Kittiwake - 941 pairs; Guillemot – 2,191 individuals; Razorbill - 522 individuals. A Gannet colony was established on the stack at the east end of the

island in the late 1980s, and in 1999 142 pairs bred. Puffin was formerly common, but nowadays not more than 20 individuals occur. Black Guillemot also breeds, with 15 individuals recorded in 1998. Several pairs each of Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover breed, while the island is a traditional site for Peregrine Falcon.

In winter small numbers of Greylag and Pale-bellied Brent Goose graze on the island.

This uninhabited marine island has a well developed maritime flora, with two habitats (sea cliffs and shingle) listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and nationally important seabird colonies. Owing to its easy access and proximity to Dublin it has great educational and amenity value.