

Site Name: Thomastown Quarry SAC

Site Code: 002252

Thomastown Quarry is situated along the R700 road about 1 km north of Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. It comprises a disused limestone quarry in which an excellent diversity of calcareous habitat types has developed.

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):

[7220] Petrifying Springs*

Bare rock accounts for a significant area of the site, occurring both on cliff faces and the quarry floor. These rocky surfaces are well covered with lichens and mosses, and, particularly where there is shallow soil, also have species such as Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*), White Stonecrop (*S. album*), Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acre*), the latter species being listed in the Irish Red Data Book. Ferns are frequent, with Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*) and Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) amongst others. Where deeper calcareous soils occur on the dry rocky surfaces, species such as Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) are found.

Seepage lines or springs are a feature of the site and of particular importance is the presence of petrifying springs with tufa formations. This rare habitat is rich in bryophytes, most notably *Palustriella commutata* var. *commutata* and *Cratoneuron filicinum*. Other species include *Calliargon giganteum*, *Campylium stellatum*, *Bryum pseudotriquetrum*, *Drepanocladus revolvens*, *Hylocomum splendens* and *Aneura pinguis*.

Alkaline fen vegetation has developed over some of the seepage areas and also around the various ponds that occur on the quarry floor. The fen vegetation is quite species rich and includes Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Toad Rush (*J. bufonius*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), various sedges (e.g. *Carex panicea* and *C. lepidocarpa*), Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*), Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*), Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*) and Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). Bryophytes are frequent in the fen habitat. Wetland plants such as Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) occur at the margins of the ponds.

The ponds support populations of the Common Frog and Common Newt, both legally protected species. A limited survey of the aquatic invertebrates recorded the presence of two rare species for Ireland, the beetle (Order Coleoptera) *Haliphus variegatus* and the Corixid bug *Hesperocorixa moesta*.

Despite its small size, this site has an excellent diversity of calcareous habitats, including petrifying springs, a habitat with priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The presence of rare and uncommon species of plant and animal add further to its interest and importance.