

Site Name: Magharee Islands SAC

Site Code: 002261

This marine site is centred around the Magharee Islands, which lie about 2 km north of the Magharee Peninsula in Co. Kerry. The site includes two of the smaller islands, Illaunnabarnagh and Mucklaghmore, which lie about 5 km to the north-east of the main group. The islands are exposed on their west coasts and more sheltered on their east coasts with moderately strong currents between them. The islands are composed of Carboniferous limestone.

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):

[1170] Reefs

The shallow water reefs around and between the Magharee Islands consist of areas that are exposed to wave action on the west coasts of the islands, more sheltered on the east coasts and subject to weak or moderate tidal streams. For the most part, the reefs are a mixture of boulders, cobbles, pebbles and sand, but in some areas are solid bedrock. In shallow water areas that are sheltered from wave action, mixed kelp forests of *Laminaria hyperborea*, *Saccorhiza polyschides* and *L. saccharina* colonize larger boulders and bedrock. On some reefs only *L. hyperborea* and *L. saccharina* are present with a sparse understorey of red algae - this is an uncommon community. The sea squirts *Polycarpa scuba* and *Distomus variolosus* occur in the kelp communities and both of these species have a limited distribution in Ireland and Britain. *P. scuba* (=rustica) has only previously been recorded from the Irish Sea, English Channel and Brittany, but was common on the south-east coast. *D. variolosus* in Ireland is only known from between Galway and Tralee Bay on the west coast, and the east and south-east coasts.

In areas exposed to wave action the reefs at depths of 19-28 m are generally characterised by a community of foliose red algae, in particular *Callophyllis laciniata*, *Schottera nicaeensis*, *Plocamium cartilagineum* and *Delesseria sanguinea* and the hydroid *Sertularia argentia*, indicating the tide-swept nature of the habitats. Branching and cushion sponge may also be common in this community. The sea squirt *Diazona violacea* and the sponge *Thymosia guernei* were recorded twice and both occur at the reef north-west of Gurrig Island. *D. violacea* is more characteristic of the deeper water Axinellid sponge community. The small crevice dwelling brittlestar *Ophiothrix balli* is frequent at several sites. Red algal species such as *Plocamium cartilagineum* and *Acrosorium venulosum* colonise small boulders and cobbles, and the red alga *Radicilingua thysanorhizans* is also present at the Mucklaghmore reefs.

Illaunbarnagh is of national importance for breeding terns. In 1995 there were 46 pairs of Common Tern and 68 pairs of Arctic Tern. All tern species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Illaunabarnagh and Mucklaghbeg also have a nationally important population of Black Guillemots (113+ individuals in 1999).

This site is of conservation significance in particular for the reefs and associated communities which it hosts. The fact that the site supports important bird colonies adds further to its value.