



Site Name: Rutland Island and Sound SAC

Site Code: 002283

Rutland Island and Sound SAC lies between Aran Island and Burtonport in north-west Donegal, 5 km north-west of Dunglow. Besides Rutland itself a number of other small rocky islets are also included in the site. The bedrock of Rutland Island is granite, but the dune systems on the island are highly calcareous.

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):

- [1150] Coastal Lagoons*
- [1160] Large Shallow Inlets and Bays
- [1170] Reefs
- [1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines
- [2110] Embryonic Shifting Dunes
- [2120] Marram Dunes (White Dunes)
- [2130] Fixed Dunes (Grey Dunes)*
- [2190] Humid Dune Slacks
- [1365] Common (Harbour) Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

On the western side of Rutland Island, vigorous embryonic dunes with Sand Couch (*Elymus farctus*) are backed by dunes with Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) and Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) and by fixed grey dunes with Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*) and mosses (e.g. *Tortula* spp.). The fixed dunes grade into dune grassland. Good dune slacks, flushes and marshes also occur in places. Plants typically occurring in these damp areas include Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*). The south end of the island has good drift line vegetation characterised by orache species (*Atriplex* spp.).

Sally's Lough, which is situated in the eastern part of the site, is a good example of a saline lake lagoon. While the lagoon basin is entirely natural, the narrow tidal inlet is apparently artificial. Seawater enters the lake on most tides but is diluted by rainfall running off the surrounding hills. Depth is up to 4 m and salinity has varied from 28 ppt to 34.3 ppt. Two lagoonal specialists, tasselweed (*Ruppia* spp.) and the green alga *Chaetomorpha linum*, were recorded in a recent survey, as well as a rare alga, *Cladophora battersii*, which grows unattached on the lagoon bed. Extensive underwater cliffs occur in the south-western quarter. These support a moderately

diverse macro-algal flora. Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) occurs at the western end of the lake and the lagoon habitat is relatively rich, with 49 additional taxa recorded in a recent survey. Four species are regarded as lagoonal specialists: the molluscs *Onoba aculeus* and *Cerastoderma glaucum*, the isopod *Idotea chelipes* and the bryozoan *Conopeum seurati*. Two further species, *Ampithoe ramondi* and *Lembos longipes* (both Order Amphipoda) are rare in Ireland.

Rutland Channel and Sound is a complex of shallow reefs and sediment communities sheltered from wave action with varying degrees of current. The intertidal reefs are typical of these conditions with high species richness in the tide-swept sublittoral fringe. The shallow sublittoral reefs have excellent examples of tide-swept kelp communities with varying degrees of sand scour in which species richness is high. A number of species considered to be worthy of conservation occur, in particular, the sea squirt *Stolonica socialis*. The site displays a range of sediment types from coarse shelly sand to fine sand. The free-living red calcareous algae known as maerl (also called 'coral') occurs at several locations at the more open coastal sites on the south of Rutland Island. Beds of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) which host the rare hydroid *Laomedea angulata* and the southern species of burrowing anemone *Anthopleura ballii* are also present.

The site supports a population of Common Seal (maximum count of 202 in the all-Ireland survey of 2003).

Snipe have been recorded in the wet areas in the dunes.

Rutland Island and Sound contains important examples of eight habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The presence of a number of rare marine species adds further to the conservation importance of the site.