

**Site Name: Carlingford Shore SAC**

**Site Code: 002306**

The Carlingford Shore SAC site comprises the entire southern shoreline of Carlingford Lough and continues round the tip of the Cooley Peninsula to just west of Cooley Point. While the principal conservation interests lie in the perennial vegetation of shingle banks and the annual vegetation of drift lines, the site also has intertidal sand and mudflats, patches of saltmarsh, some areas of dry grassland, and an area of mixed deciduous woodland. The site is flanked by Carlingford Mountain to the south-west. The underlying rock within the SAC is mainly carboniferous limestone. This outcrops in places in the form of bedrock shore or reefs. Granite boulders are occasionally found. Intertidal mudflats and sand/gravel banks also occur.

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):

[1210] Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines [1220] Perennial Vegetation of Stony Banks
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In Carlingford Shore SAC the shingle and drift line habitats extend more or less continuously from Greenore to west of Cooley Point. They occur as a strip of varying width, from only a few metres in places, to up to about 50 m. One of the best developed areas is south of Ballagan Point. The substrate varies from stones and cobbles to gravels and coarse sands. The exposure level of this shoreline is high.

The perennial vegetation of the upper beach of these shingle banks is widely ranging, well developed and often stable. In places lichens encrust the stones farther back from the sea. Typical species present throughout the site include oraches (*Atriplex* spp., including *A. prostrata*, *A. glabriuscula* and *A. littoralis*), Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) and Sea Radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum* subsp. *maritimum*). This grades landward mainly into lowland dry grassland, though there are patches of wet grassland.

The vegetation of the stony banks is often interspersed with the vegetation occupying accumulations of drift material and gravels rich in nitrogenous organic matter. The vegetation is sparse. Species seen include Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*) and oraches. The Red Data

Book species Oysterplant (*Mertensia maritima*) is also found. This plant is protected under the Flora (Protection) Order, 1999.

There are small patches of saltmarsh on the drier sections of outcropping reefs and at the landward edge of the site. Species present include Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*), Sea Purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*), Lax-flowered Sea-lavender (*Limonium humile*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*). In areas which are more regularly flooded Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) is found. A small brackish lake is present on the landward side of the railway line.

A relatively extensive expanse of intertidal flats (more sand than mud) occur, particularly between Greenore Point and Carlingford Harbour. The flats in this area are broken by outcropping reefs and some shingle deposits and saltmarsh on the drier higher rocks. These flats are very important feeding grounds for wildfowl and waders. Patches of green algae (filamentous, *Ulva* sp. and *Enteromorpha* sp.) and lugworm casts occur in places, while fucoid seaweeds are common on the more stony flats. Abundant barnacle shells and lichens are also present on many of the rocks. Eelgrass (*Zostera* sp.) beds are found on the flats - the main food source for the internationally important population of Pale-bellied Brent Goose at the site. Small tufts of cord-grass (*Spartina* sp.) are also found.

Above the low-lying shoreline dry grassland often occurs, with species such as Red Fescue, Common Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*). West of Carlingford town the shoreline is backed in places by low cliffs. An area of mixed woodland occurs at Ferry Hill, overlooking the mouth of the Newry River. This has a low canopy dominated by Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and with some Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). The non-native and invasive Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) is common.

The threshold for internationally important numbers of birds within the site has been exceeded in single years, by some species such as Pale-bellied Brent Goose in the 1980s and 1994/95. The site is nationally important for a number of species such as Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Ringed Plover and Red-Breasted Merganser. This classification is based on species which attained interim all-Ireland importance on the basis of the three year mean maximum counts for the winters 1994/95-96/97. There are a number of bird species recorded, including Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, which are listed under Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The intertidal flats between Greenore and Carlingford have been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive. Black Guillemots (6) were recorded in pairs nesting in wooden breakwater in Greenore and 8 birds were seen at the breakwater. A colony of Terns in Northern Ireland feed in the SPA, particularly Sandwich Tern with some Common Tern.

Approximately 25-30 Grey Seals haul out on reefs between Greenore and Carlingford. This species is listed in Annex II under the E.U. Habitats Directive.

The principal activities in the site are recreational usage and shellfish production. Much of the area around the mean low water mark (MLWM) between Carlingford Harbour and Greenore is under production of oyster, and to a lesser extent, clams. The principal threat to the shoreline habitats is further commercial development, either for shellfish or tourism. Coastal defence works is also a threat to the shoreline. Aquaculture occurs in Carlingford Lough and may have negative impacts on the wintering bird populations.

Carlingford Shore has a wide diversity of habitats including very good examples of perennial vegetation of stony banks and drift lines. The presence of Red Data Book species adds to the ecological interest. The wide area of intertidal flats within the site is internationally important for birds and is designated as a Special Protection Area. The presence of Grey Seal, an Annex II species under the E.U. Habitats Directive, adds to the conservation value of the site.