

Site Name: South-east Rockall Bank SAC

Site Code: 003002

South-east Rockall Bank is a relatively shallow bank to the north-west of Ireland, separated from the Porcupine shelf by deeper areas within the Rockall Trough. The site is approximately 170 km long and 31 km wide at its greatest extent, and is situated 335 km north-west of Co. Mayo.

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 topography of the area lying within Irish waters was most extensively mapped during the Irish National Seabed Survey in 2001 by the R.V. *Bligh*. The multibeam echo-sounder data revealed the complexity of the bank which is characterised by several escarpment features (a long steep slope or cliff at the edge of a plateau or ridge) occurring at water depths between 500-1,500m. The escarpment features can be traced over a total distance of approximately 300 km at the South-east Rockall Bank. Interpretations of seismic profiles revealed two large slumps at the upper parts of the slope. Whilst their origin is not clear, they may have developed as a consequence of lower sea levels or may be indirectly related to subsidence of the Rockall Plateau. The results of recent surveys indicated various areas of hard substrate including pebbles, boulders and exposed bedrock. These sometimes formed steep inclines, escarpments, vertical walls, and cliffs with ledges, overhangs and caves. The hard substrate was sometimes covered in a veneer of soft sediment. A number of sea mounds were also identified in the area.

The fauna encountered within the designated area include a range of poriferans (desmonospongia, encrusting, glass sponge - *Aphrocallistes* sp.), cnidarians (including *Anthipatharian* sp., sea whips, bamboo coral, black coral, *Lophelia pertusa*, soft corals (*Anthomastus grandiflora*), solitary corals (*Flabellum* sp., *Solenosmilia variabilis*), gorgonians, stylasteroid hydroids, sea pens (*Pennatula phophorea*), ascidians (sea squirts), starfish (*Brisingella coronata*), feather stars, sea cucumbers, brittle stars (*Ophiomusium lymani*)), crustaceans (shrimp), and fish including eels and *Neocyttus* sp.

Long-finned Pilot Whale and Sperm Whale are known to occur at the South-east Rockall Bank.

A number of bird species have been recorded in the vicinity of South-east Rockall Bank, including Storm Petrel. Other species include Sooty and Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Parasitic and Great Skua, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Kittiwake.

The site has been selected as a Special Area of Conservation for reefs, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.