

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: SALTEE ISLANDS SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004002**

The Saltee Islands SPA is situated some 4-5 km off the coast of south Co. Wexford and comprises the two islands, Great Saltee and Little Saltee, and the surrounding seas both between them and to a distance of 500 m from them. The bedrock of the islands is of Precambrian gneiss and granite. Both islands have exposed rocky cliffs on their south and east – those on Great Saltee being mostly *c.* 30 m high, those on Little Saltee about half this height. The northern and western sides of both islands are fringed with shingle and boulder shores, backed by boulder clay cliffs, as well as small areas of intertidal sandflats. Sea caves occur at the base of the cliffs on Great Saltee.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Fulmar, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds.

The Saltee Islands are internationally important for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds. The nationally important Gannet colony on Great Saltee has been well documented since its establishment in the 1920s and 2,446 pairs were present in 2004. The following species have populations of national importance (all counts in the 1998-2000 breeding seasons): Fulmar (520 pairs), Cormorant (273 pairs), Shag (268 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (164 pairs), Herring Gull (73 pairs), Kittiwake (2,125 pairs), Guillemot (14,362 pairs), Razorbill (2,505 pairs) and Puffin (1,822 pairs). An estimated 250 pairs of Manx Shearwater occur on these islands. Seabird populations are monitored annually and large numbers of chicks, especially of Gannets, auks and Shags, are ringed.

Peregrine Falcon breeds (1-2 pairs) and Chough (1 pair) occurs at the eastern edge of its Irish range. Hen Harrier uses the site for autumn passage and overwintering.

Great Saltee is a major site for spring and autumn landbird migration and was the site for Ireland's first bird observatory. While the observatory is no longer operational, substantial numbers of migrants are still ringed annually. Large numbers of pipits, swallows and martins, thrushes, warblers and finches occur, while smaller numbers of a great variety of other species (some very rare in Ireland) are also recorded.

The Saltee Islands SPA is of international importance for breeding seabirds; it also supports populations of three species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Peregrine, Chough and Hen Harrier. It is one of the best-documented sites in the country and is monitored annually.

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