

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: PUFFIN ISLAND SPA

SITE CODE: 004003

Puffin Island lies approximately 0.5 km off the northern side of St Finan's bay in south-west Co. Kerry. It is a long, narrow island of Old Red Sandstone. The island is almost divided into two halves – the southern half is a long narrow, rocky ridge, rising to 130 m, while the northern half broadens into a grassy plateau though has a high point of 159 m. The island is surrounded by mostly steep cliffs and slopes. The vegetation of the main part of the island is a typical maritime grassy sward, though nine different plant communities have been distinguished, including a small area of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) heath. A Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) community dominates the slopes. In the past Puffin Island was grazed quite heavily by sheep, and today rabbits are common.

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

Puffin Island is one of the most important seabird sites in Ireland. In the Seabird 2000 survey, it supported internationally important populations of Storm Petrel (5,177 pairs) and Manx Shearwater (6,329 pairs). Puffin Island is the second most important site in Ireland for Manx Shearwater. The nationally important population of breeding Puffin (5,125 pairs) was the largest recorded in Ireland during the Seabird 2000 survey. The island also supports nationally important populations of Fulmar (447 pairs in 2000), Razorbill (402 pairs in 1985 - incomplete survey in 2000) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (139 pairs in 2000). Other seabirds recorded during the Seabird 2000 survey include Shag (5 pairs), Kittiwake (25 pairs), Guillemot (92 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (72 pairs).

Chough also breeds on Puffin Island with up to 3 pairs recorded in 1992 and at least one pair in 2002. During winter the resident population may be joined by other birds that breed on the mainland.

Puffin Island SPA is of international importance for its breeding seabird assemblage. The presence of Chough and Storm Petrel is of particular note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The island is owned by BirdWatch Ireland and is managed for conservation. Puffin Island is a Statutory Nature Reserve.

19.5.2015