

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: INISHKEA ISLANDS SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004004**

The Inishkea Islands are the two largest islands off the west coast of the Mullet Peninsula in north-west County Mayo. As well as Inishkea North and Inishkea South, this site includes Carrickawilt, Carrigee, Carrickmoynenacurhoga, Pluddany Rocks, Carrickfad, Carrickgormal, Carricklaur, Carrickalaveen and several smaller rocks and reefs. The surrounding seas, to a distance of 200m, are included within the site.

The north island is low-lying and dominated by machair, a habitat listed with priority status on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. The south island has a low-lying cover of machair vegetation in the northern part, but is characterised by a heath-covered ridge and hill (70 m O.D.) to the south. Some of the smaller islands and islets have a permanent area with a grassy sward above the tide line.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Barnacle Goose, Shag, Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin, Turnstone, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Arctic Tern and Little Tern.

The Inishkeas are of ornithological importance for both wintering and breeding birds. The islands are one of the most important wintering sites for Barnacle Goose in Ireland and support an internationally important population (2,481 – 4 survey mean between 1993 and 2003). The geese also make much use of neighbouring islands, particularly the Duvillauns and Inishkeeragh. Several wader species also occur here during the winter in nationally important numbers: Ringed Plover (225), Sanderling (140), Purple Sandpiper (50) and Turnstone (275) – all counts are the two year mean peaks for the winters, 1996/97 and 1999/2000.

The Inishkeas also support nationally important breeding populations of Shag (90 pairs), Common Gull (47 pairs), Herring Gull (81 pairs) – all data from Seabird 2000 Survey. Other breeding seabirds recorded on the islands include Fulmar (216 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (40 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (100 pairs). Storm Petrel also breeds (59 pairs were recorded on Inishkea North in 2001). The islands are also a traditional breeding site for terns – the 1995 All-Ireland Tern Survey recorded Common Tern (1 pair), Arctic Tern (73 pairs) and Little Tern (4 pairs). A survey in July 2000 recorded Arctic Tern (182 pairs) and Little Tern (27 pairs). Further surveys of the Little Tern population recorded 68 pairs in 2003 and 63 pairs in 2007. The populations of Arctic Tern and Little Tern are of national importance.

The islands also support a nationally important population of breeding Dunlin [subsp. *schinzii*] (17 pairs, three survey mean 1985 to 2009). Other waders also breed within the site including: Oystercatcher (108 pairs), Lapwing (95 pairs), Ringed Plover (81 pairs), Redshank (23 pairs), Snipe (21 pairs) - all data from 2009.

The site is a traditional breeding site for Peregrine, and Chough have bred in the past although none were recorded in the 1992 or 2002 surveys. Corncrake formerly bred on the islands and, after a long absence, two calling males were recorded in 1998, and one calling male in both 1999 and 2000. Other breeding species include Shelduck, Skylark, Wheatear and Raven.

The Inishkea Islands SPA is of ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important population of Barnacle Goose, nationally important populations of four other species of wintering waterbird and breeding populations of six wader species. A number of the species that regularly occur are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, notably Barnacle Goose, Storm Petrel, Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*), Arctic Tern, Common Tern and Little Tern. The presence of Corncrake, Great Northern Diver, Golden Plover, Peregrine and Chough, also Annex I species, is of note. The Inishkea Islands are a Wildfowl Sanctuary.