

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: OLD HEAD OF KINSALE SPA

SITE CODE: 004021

The Old Head lies approximately 10 km south of the town of Kinsale in Co. Cork, and is a 5 km long headland formed of steeply inclined beds of rock. These show a cross section of the transition between the Devonian and Carboniferous periods and so have considerable interest from a geological point of view. The site comprises a section of the cliffs on the western side of the narrow isthmus leading to the Head and a 500 m seaward extension. These are vertical rock cliffs providing optimum habitat for ledge nesting seabirds. Maritime grassland and heath occurs above the steep cliffs. The cliff-top vegetation is characterised by such species as Autumn Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Bent Grasses (*Agrostis* spp.) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), with Sea Campion (*Silene maritima*), Thrift (*Ameria maritima*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) also present.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Kittiwake and Guillemot.

The Old Head is the largest seabird colony on the south coast between the Bull Rock and the Saltee Islands. In 2001 the Seabird 2000 Survey recorded nationally important populations of Kittiwake (951 pairs) and Guillemot (2,330 pairs), as well as smaller numbers of Fulmar (37 pairs), Shag (26 pairs), Herring Gull (11 pairs) and Razorbill (59 pairs). Chough and Peregrine, which breed elsewhere on the Head, are regularly seen within the site.

Old Head of Kinsale SPA is of high ornithological importance for its breeding seabird populations, two species of which occur in nationally important numbers. The presence of Chough and Peregrine, two species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is also of note. Owing to the importance of the bird populations, the site was designated as a Refuge for Fauna in 1989.