

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYMACODA BAY SPA

SITE CODE: 004023

This coastal site stretches north-east from Ballymacoda to within several kilometres of Youghal, Co. Cork. It comprises the estuary of the Womanagh River, a substantial river which drains a large agricultural catchment. Part of the tidal section of the river is included in the site and on the seaward side the boundary extends to, and includes, Bog Rock, Barrel Rocks and Black Rock. The inner part of the estuary is well sheltered by the Ring peninsula, a stabilised sand spit with sand dunes at its northern end and salt marshes on the landward side. Sediment types vary from muds to muddy sands in the inner part to fine rippled sands in the outer exposed part. The macro-invertebrate fauna of the intertidal flats is well-developed, with the following species occurring: Ragworm (*Hediste diversicolor*), the crustacean *Corophium volutator*, Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), Baltic Tellin (*Macoma balthica*), Peppery Furrow-shell (*Scrobicularia plana*), Common Cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) and the tubeworm *Lanice conchilega*. In the more sheltered areas the intertidal flats are colonised by mats of green algae (mostly *Ulva* spp.), with brown seaweeds occurring on the rocky shores of the shingle spits. Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*) has spread within the estuary since the late 1970s. The main channel is flanked by salt marshes and wet fields, much of the latter being improved for agriculture.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Wigeon, Teal, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Sanderling, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

Ballymacoda Bay is of high ornithological importance for supporting an excellent diversity and large number of wintering waterbirds – it is of international importance because it regularly supports an assemblage of over 20,000 birds. The site provides both feeding and roosting areas for the birds. Furthermore, both Golden Plover (10,920) and Black-tailed Godwit (765) occur here in internationally important numbers (all counts given are mean peaks for the five year period 1995/96-1999/2000). A further eleven species of waders and ducks occur here in nationally important numbers, i.e. Wigeon (907), Teal (887), Ringed Plover (153), Grey Plover (535), Lapwing (4,063), Sanderling (98), Dunlin (3,192), Bar-tailed Godwit (581), Curlew (1,145), Redshank (357) and Turnstone (137). The site is also notable for supporting nationally important populations of some gull species in autumn and winter: Black-headed Gull (1,560), Common Gull (1,120) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (5,051). A total of 107 species were recorded from the site between 1971 and 1988.

Ballymacoda Bay SPA is one of the most important sites in the country for wintering waterfowl. It qualifies for international importance on the basis of regularly exceeding 20,000 wintering birds but also for its Golden Plover and Black-tailed Godwit populations. In addition, it supports nationally important populations of a further fourteen species. Two of the species which occur, Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Ballymacoda Bay is also a Ramsar Convention site.

7.7.2014