

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DUNGARVAN HARBOUR SPA

SITE CODE: 004032

Dungarvan Harbour SPA is located in south-west Co. Waterford and lies at the eastern end of the former valley of the River Blackwater - this river now turns south at Cappoquin, vacating its original course. The site includes Dungarvan Harbour as far east as Ballynacourty Point and west to include the tidal sections of the River Brickey. Three rivers flow into Dungarvan Harbour - the Colligan River, which runs south from the Comeragh Mountains, enters the bay by Dungarvan town, the River Brickey, which flows into the harbour from the west, and the Glendine River which enters from the north. The absence of a large river entering the site means that the bay is essentially a marine habitat, although it dries out at low tide to give extensive mud and sand flats. The inner bay is extremely sheltered, being almost closed off by the linear Cunnigar spit to the east.

Limestone underlies most of the area though this is only exposed as flat rocks at Ballynacourty. Elsewhere, saltmarsh, glacial drift and sand form the shore with a narrow stony beach occurring in places. The most natural areas of saltmarsh occur at Kilminnin on the north shore and west of the Cunnigar in the south. In several places the saltmarshes that were reclaimed in the past have been flooded again and are reverting to their natural vegetation. There is an abundance of Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) in such places, often mixed with grasses, and with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) or Sea Club-rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) occurring in the drains.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Great Crested Grebe, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank and Turnstone. 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.

A major part of the ecological importance of Dungarvan Harbour is the wintering waterbirds which are present in large numbers. The site is of international importance because it regularly supports an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering waterbirds. Furthermore, both Light-bellied Brent Goose (723) and Black-tailed Godwit (779) occur here in internationally important numbers (all counts given are mean peaks for the five year period 1995/96-1999/2000). A further thirteen species occur here in nationally important numbers - Great Crested Grebe (53), Shelduck (538), Red-breasted Merganser (52), Oystercatcher (767), Golden Plover (4,980), Grey Plover (444), Lapwing (3,233), Knot (698), Dunlin (4,984), Bar-tailed Godwit (1,068), Curlew (766), Redshank (731) and Turnstone (177). Little Egret, a species which has recently colonised Ireland, also occurs at this site.

Dungarvan Harbour SPA is an important site for wintering waterfowl, providing good quality feeding areas and roost sites for an excellent diversity of waterfowl species. The site is of high conservation importance, for supporting internationally important populations of Light-bellied Brent Goose and Black-tailed Godwit and because it regularly supports in excess of 20,000 wintering waterbirds. In addition, it holds nationally important populations of a further thirteen species, including Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, two species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Dungarvan Harbour is a Ramsar Convention site.