

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: KILLARNEY NATIONAL PARK SPA

SITE CODE: 004038

This large site encompasses the lakes and part of the Macgillicuddy's Reeks in the vicinity of the town of Killarney in Co. Kerry. The underlying geology is Old Red Sandstone and, on the eastern shores of Lough Leane, Carboniferous limestone. Lough Leane is the largest (8.6 km along its long axis) of the lakes in the site, and is classified as a mesotrophic system. Muckcross Lake and the Upper Lake are both high quality oligotrophic systems.

Killarney National Park is perhaps best known for its Oak woodlands. They form the most extensive area of native woodland remaining in Ireland and include Derrycunihy Wood, described as perhaps the most natural Sessile Oak wood in the country. The higher areas of the site are dominated by blanket bog and wet heath.

At the time this site was designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) it was being utilised by Greenland White-fronted Goose. This, along with the nearby Eirk Bog, is the most southerly site in Ireland utilised by this species and it is also one of the few flocks that continues to utilise peatland habitats. The site continues to be used by Greenland White-fronted Goose in small numbers (<20 birds) and is regarded as a special conservation interest for this SPA.

While Killarney National Park has not been subject to a complete upland breeding bird survey the habitat within the site is estimated to support up to 5 pairs of Merlin and therefore this species is regarded as a special conservation interest for this SPA.

Other upland species which breed within the site include Peregrine (1 pair), Ring Ouzel (1-2 pairs) and Red Grouse. The extensive woodlands support some scarce breeding birds, notably Redstart (1-2 pairs), Wood Warbler (1-2 pairs) and Garden Warbler (possibly up to 10 pairs).

Lough Leane, and to a lesser extent the other lakes, support a variety of wintering waterfowl species including Mute Swan (38), Teal (184), Mallard (361), Pochard (54), Tufted Duck (271), Goldeneye (23), Little Grebe (11), Cormorant (86), Coot (124) and Black-headed Gull (84) – all counts are three year mean peaks for the period 1995/96-1997/98. Several research programmes have been carried out on the birds in the site, including studies on the communities associated with the Yew woodlands, and the wildfowl associated with the lakes. Part of Killarney National Park SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.