

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: THE BULL AND THE COW ROCKS SPA

SITE CODE: 004066

The site comprises two very small rocky islands, the Cow and the Bull, situated 2.5 km and 4 km respectively from Dursey Head off the coast of Co. Cork. The islands, which are composed of vertically stratified sandstone, rise to over 60 m and are generally precipitous. Vegetation is sparse and is a typical maritime flora, mostly comprising a sward of Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and Sea Campion (*Silene maritima*). A few rocky islets occur off the main islands. The surrounding water, between and to a distance of 500 m around each island, is included within the site for the benefit of the breeding seabirds. The Commissioners of Irish Lights maintain a lighthouse on the Bull.

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

The site holds one of the most important seabird colonies in the country, with populations of Storm Petrel and Gannet of at least national importance. The petrels breed on both the Cow and the Bull but have not been censused in recent times. The Seabird 2000 survey estimated that there were 3,500 pairs at the site. The Gannet colony on the Bull is long established and had 3,694 pairs in 2004 – this is the second largest colony in Ireland.

The site also supports a good diversity of other seabird species though these have not been surveyed since at least the early 1990s. The populations of Puffin (200 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (280 pairs) may be of national importance. Other species which breed are Cormorant (40 pairs), Kittiwake (350 pairs), Guillemot (938 pairs), Fulmar (40 pairs), Herring Gull (<20 pairs) and Razorbill (88 pairs).

Both islands are extremely inaccessible and difficult to land on and hence are seldom visited.

This site supports important populations of Storm Petrel and Gannet. Storm Petrel is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Owing to their importance, both islands have been designated as Refuges for Fauna. The Cow is State-owned.