

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LAMBAY ISLAND SPA

SITE CODE: 004069

Lambay Island lies approximately 4 km off the north Co. Dublin coastline and is separated from it by a channel of 10-13 m in depth. East of Lambay Island the water deepens rapidly into the Irish Sea basin. The island, which rises to 127 m, has an area of 250 ha above high tide mark. The underlying geology is very varied, but is dominated by volcanic igneous rocks (of andesitic type) and ash; also present are shales, limestones and limestone conglomerates. The soils are generally shallow and are derived from glacial tills of Irish Sea origin. The shallow soils are peaty on high exposed ground and above the cliffs. On the western side of the island the land rises gently from a bedrock shoreline. Cobble storm beaches are associated with this shore and at low tide sandflats are exposed within the harbour and below a section of the rocky shore. The northern, eastern and most of the southern shorelines consist of steep cliffs varying from about 15 m to 50 m high. These are backed by vegetated slopes along most of their length. The cliff slopes have a typical maritime vegetation, including such species as Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene maritima*), Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) and Spring Squill (*Scilla verna*). Some sheltered gullies have small areas of scrub woodland dominated by Elder (*Sambucus nigra*).

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Fulmar, Cormorant, Shag, Greylag Goose, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding and assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds.

Lambay Island is internationally important for its breeding seabirds and is of particular note for the diversity of these, with 12 species breeding regularly. A survey in 1999 recorded internationally important populations of Cormorant (675 pairs), Shag (1,122 pairs) and Guillemot (40,705 pairs). A further six species have breeding populations of national importance, i.e. Fulmar (585 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (309 pairs), Herring Gull (1,806 pairs), Kittiwake (4,091 pairs), Razorbill (2,906 pairs) and Puffin (265 pairs). The island's populations of Cormorant, Shag, Herring Gull and Guillemot are the largest in Ireland. Lambay Island holds the only known colony of Manx Shearwater (25 pairs in 2002) on the east coast of Ireland; in addition, Black Guillemot also breeds here (4 pairs in 1999). In 2007 two new species were added to the island's list of breeding seabirds: Gannet (68 pairs) and Common Gull (1 pair). A survey in 2004 recorded breeding Cormorant (352 pairs), Shag (1,734 pairs), Guillemot (38,999 pairs), Fulmar (727 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (133 pairs), Herring Gull (311 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (145 pairs), Kittiwake (3,947 pairs), Razorbill (3,805 pairs) and Puffin (209 pairs).

In winter, Lambay Island supports nationally important populations of Greylag Goose (311) and Herring Gull (2,400) – figures are the five year mean peak for the winters 1995/96-1999/2000. Up to the mid 1990s, a Barnacle Goose flock wintered on the island (the only such flock in eastern Ireland) but these have since abandoned the site. Other species which utilise the site during the winter include Light-bellied Brent Goose (55), Oystercatcher (155), Purple Sandpiper (9), Curlew (211) and Turnstone (32). Lambay Island is also the only regular wintering site in Ireland for Whimbrel (5 in 2006).

Lambay Island is a traditional nesting site for Peregrine and also supports the largest colony of breeding Oystercatcher (20-25 pairs) on the east coast. Ringed Plover, Shelduck, Buzzard, Long-eared Owl, Raven and a variety of passerines such as Stonechat, Whitethroat and Reed Bunting also breed.

Lambay Island supports a long-established breeding colony of Grey Seal, a species that is listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive. A number of non-native mammals, including Fallow Deer and Red-necked Wallaby, have been introduced onto Lambay Island during the last century. Brown Rat is also present and, notably, the last authenticated record of Black Rat living wild in Ireland was from Lambay Island in 1988. The rat population on the island is believed to be negatively impacting on the burrow nesting species, i.e. Manx Shearwater and Puffin.

Lambay Island SPA holds an internationally important seabird colony and is one of the top seabird sites in Ireland. Three seabird species have breeding populations of international importance and a further six have populations of national importance. In addition to the seabirds, the island also supports nationally important wintering populations of Greylag Goose and Herring Gull. The presence of Peregrine, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is also of note.