

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: TORY ISLAND SPA

SITE CODE: 004073

Tory Island is a remote, rocky island lying some 11 km to the north of Bloody Foreland in County Donegal. The island is around 4 km long by 1 km wide and consists in the main of igneous granite, with a few dolerite intrusions. The extreme eastern section, however, is made up of more erosion-resistant Ards Quartzite, and high (up to 83 m), dramatic coastal cliffs occur here. The cliffs continue along much of the north coastline. The southern shoreline is low-lying, consisting of bedrock shore and boulder beach. A marine area, extending 500 m from the base of the cliffs along the eastern and north-east side of the island, is included within the site.

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

Tory Island SPA supports a breeding population of Corncrake (25 pairs - five year mean between 2003 and 2007, based on records of calling males). Tory Island SPA is one of a suite of sites along the western seaboard that is regularly utilised by nationally important numbers of breeding Corncrake.

Corncrake winter in southern and eastern Africa, migrating northwards to arrive on their breeding grounds from early April onwards, departing again in August and September. They require the cover of tall vegetation throughout their breeding cycle and are strongly associated with meadows which are harvested annually, where they nest and feed. Annual cutting of these meadows creates a sward which is easy for the birds to move through. Other habitats, which can provide cover for Corncrake in the early and late stages of the breeding season, are also important for this species.

Corncrake is listed on the 2010 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. This is due to population and range declines of more than 50% in the last 25 years across significant parts of its range.

Tory Island SPA also supports nationally important breeding populations of Fulmar (641 pairs), Razorbill (671 pairs) and Puffin (1,402 pairs) - all figures from 1999. Other species that occur include Kittiwake (408 pairs), Guillemot (381 pairs) and Black Guillemot (32 pairs), with smaller numbers of Shag (27 pairs), Herring Gull (15 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (2 pairs), Black-headed Gull (70 pairs) and Common Gull (17 pairs).

A small Storm Petrel colony is thought to still exist on Tory but has not been censused in recent years. Tory Island is a traditional breeding site for the scarce Little Tern; up to 20 pairs have been recorded in the past, with a count of 15 individuals seen in 1999.

At least one pair of Peregrine nests on Tory in most years. A further species characteristic of exposed coastal areas, Chough, also nests, with six pairs present in 1992. A range of wader species breed, including Oystercatcher (up to 5 pairs), Ringed Plover (*c.* 20 pairs), Lapwing (*c.* 20 pairs), Snipe (up to 5 pairs) and Redshank (2 pairs). Tree Sparrow, a very localised species in Ireland, also breeds in small numbers.

Tory Island has a diverse bird fauna that is very characteristic of exposed offshore islands. It is of high ornithological importance as it supports a nationally important population of Corncrake, a globally threatened species. Nationally important breeding populations of three other species also occur. Of particular note is that five of the species which breed on Tory are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Corncrake, Storm Petrel, Little Tern, Peregrine and Chough.

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