

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CLONAKILTY BAY SPA

SITE CODE: 004081

Clonakilty Bay, which is located in west County Cork, is a wetland complex that stretches from the town of Clonakilty to the open sea. It comprises two small estuarine bays, Clonakilty Harbour and Muckcross Strand, separated by Inchydoney Island and its empoldered isthmus. Several small rivers flow into the site, notably the Fealge River. At low tide, substantial areas of sand and mud flats are exposed. The construction of a causeway across the inner part of Muckcross Strand created an extensive wetland complex known as Cloheen Strand Intake.

Intertidal sand and mud flats occupy the majority of the site area and these provide the main food resource for the wintering waterfowl. Sand flats dominate the intertidal area, although mud flats occur at the sheltered upper end of the inlets. The vegetation consists of algal mats (*Ulva* spp.), with brown seaweeds (*Fucus* spp.) occurring where the shore is rocky. The invasive Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*) occurs in places. The intertidal flats have a typical diversity of macro-invertebrates, including Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), Peppery Furrow-shell (*Scrobicularia plana*), Ragworm (*Hediste diversicolor*), the marine bristle worms *Nephtys hombergii* and *N. cirrosa*, Laver Spire-shell (*Hydrobia ulvae*) and Common Cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*).

The Cloheen Strand Intake wetland contains a fine range of habitats from saline lagoons, to brackish grasslands, open freshwater marsh and wet grassland. This area provides the main roosting area for birds at high tide. Birds also roost elsewhere above the shoreline and on the sandy beach associated with the dune system at Inchydoney Island.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Shelduck, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew. 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.

The site contains a good diversity of wintering waterbirds, with over 8,000 birds occurring regularly. The site is noted for its internationally important population of Black-tailed Godwit (874) - all count data refers to the 4-year mean peak 1995/96 to 1998/99. The ecology of this population has been studied in detail in recent years. Three species occur in nationally important numbers: Shelduck (156), Dunlin (1,172), and Curlew (599). Other species that occur at the site include Mute Swan (53), Wigeon (487), Teal (216), Mallard (93), Red-breasted Merganser (10), Cormorant (13), Oystercatcher (316), Ringed Plover (103), Golden Plover (857), Grey Plover (61), Lapwing (1,658), Knot (168), Bar-tailed Godwit (79) Redshank (252), Greenshank (33) and Turnstone (38).

Little Egret, a species that has recently colonised Ireland, has been recorded in small numbers (4 year mean peak of 5, maximum 7). Grey Heron (14) commonly uses the site and a heronry is located in the trees near Clonakilty. Cloheen Strand Inlet is also a regular wintering site for usually up to 3, but occasionally 7, Short-eared Owl.

The site is a regular staging post for scarce autumn migrants, especially Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank. In most years it is also visited by vagrant waders from North America.

Clonakilty Bay SPA is of high ornithological importance, particularly for its internationally important population of Black-tailed Godwit. In addition, there are three species with populations of national importance. The presence of the E.U. Birds Directive Annex I species, Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Little Egret and Short-eared Owl, is of note.

8.7.2014