

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: IRELAND'S EYE SPA

SITE CODE: 004117

Ireland's Eye is an uninhabited island located about 1.5 km north of Howth in Co. Dublin. The site encompasses Ireland's Eye, Rowan Rocks, Thulla, Thulla Rocks, Carrageen Bay and a seaward extension of 200m in the west and 500m to the north and east. The island has an area of *c.* 24 ha above the high tide mark. The underlying geology is Cambrian greywackes and quartzites. These rocks form impressive near-vertical cliffs, reaching 69 m, along the northern and eastern sides of the island, with scattered exposures elsewhere on the island and especially in the high northern half. A tall stack, which is completely cut off from the main island at mid to high tide, occurs at the eastern side of the cliffs. A sandy beach, backed by low sand hills, occurs at Carrageen Bay on the western shore, while a shingle beach extends from Carrageen to Thulla Rocks. Elsewhere the island is covered by glacial drift. A low-lying, sparsely vegetated islet, known as Thulla, occurs a little to the south of the island, and an extensive area of bedrock shore (heavily covered by brown seaweeds) is exposed at low tide between Thulla and the main island. There are no watercourses or springs on the island, though two small rainwater ponds form during winter in the north-west and north-east sectors.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Cormorant, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill.

Ireland's Eye has important populations of breeding seabirds. In 1999 the following species were recorded: Fulmar (70 pairs), Gannet (147 pairs), Cormorant (306 pairs), Shag (32 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (1 pair), Great Black-backed Gull (90 pairs), Herring Gull (246 pairs), Kittiwake (941 pairs), Guillemot (1,468 pairs) and Razorbill (350 pairs) and Puffin (4 pairs). In 2001 an incomplete census recorded Gannet (202 pairs), Cormorant (438 pairs), Kittiwake (1,024 pairs), Guillemot (1,975 pairs) and Razorbill (460 pairs). A Gannet survey by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2004 recorded 285 pairs. Black Guillemot may also breed, with 15 individuals recorded in 1998. The Cormorant, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill populations are of national importance. The majority of the Cormorant population nest on Thulla and when considered as part of a larger grouping with the colonies on nearby Lambay and St. Patrick's Island, this population is of international importance. The Gannet colony is of particular note as it is one of six in the country and one of only two sites on the east coast. The colony has only been established as recently as the late 1980s and as all breeding ledges became fully occupied in 2006 a satellite colony was then established on the nearby island of Lambay.

Several pairs each of Shelduck, Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover breed. The island is also a traditional site for Peregrine, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U.

Birds Directive. In winter small numbers of Greylag Goose and Pale-bellied Brent Goose graze on the island and it is used as a roost site by gulls and some waders.

Ireland's Eye SPA, though a relatively small island, is of high ornithological importance, with five seabird species having populations of national importance. The regular presence of a breeding pair of Peregrine, an Annex I species, is also of note.