

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: KEERAGH ISLANDS SPA

SITE CODE: 004118

The Keeragh Islands are two low-lying islets located just over 1 km offshore from the south Wexford coastline. The site includes the islets and associated rocky shorelines and reefs, as well as the surrounding marine area to a distance of 200 m. The islets, which rise to a maximum height of about 10 m above sea level, have a small area of land permanently above the tide line. The vegetation is predominantly maritime in character, with species such as Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*) occurring. The surrounding reefs support a range of seaweeds.

This site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Cormorant.

The islands have a nationally important breeding colony of Cormorant (200 pairs recorded in 2000), which is considered to be one of the largest in the country. The colony has been well-monitored since it was first recorded in 1968 and there has been a long-term ringing programme. Terns, mainly Arctic Tern, have bred in the past but not since the 1970s. Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull have also bred but no population estimates for recent years are available. A small number of Shag (c.10 pairs) were present in 1970.

In winter the islands are a refuge and night roost for flocks of Light-bellied Brent Goose and for ducks, notably Mallard and Wigeon, as well as smaller numbers of Teal and Shoveler.

The Keeragh Islands SPA is of particular ornithological importance for its nationally important population of breeding Cormorant. It retains potential for attracting breeding terns, species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.