

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOOP HEAD SPA

SITE CODE: 004119

Loop Head is situated at the most westerly point in Co. Clare, approximately 20 km south-west of Kilkee. The site includes the cliffs, shoreline and the adjacent marine area to a distance of 500 m from the shore. The vertical cliffs are impressive, rising to 60 m and extending for 5 km along the coast. They are composed of Carboniferous grits and flags and are highly exposed to the open Atlantic Ocean. A number of islets and stacks occur, notably Gull Island and Dermot & Grania's Rock. An automated lighthouse sits on the headland.

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

While much of the cliff face is unvegetated, a range of plant species typical of such cliffs are to be found, including Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*). The cliff tops support a vegetation community that is very characteristic of exposed parts of the western seaboard, comprising of a short '*Plantago*' sward of Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and Buck's-horn Plantain (*P. coronopus*), along with Thrift.

The cliffs support large numbers of breeding seabirds. A survey in 1987 recorded Fulmar (66 pairs), Kittiwake (690 pairs), Guillemot (2,687 pairs) and Razorbill (70 pairs). A further, but incomplete, survey in 2000 recorded Fulmar (45 pairs), Guillemot (3,350 pairs), Razorbill (13 pairs) and Kittiwake (260 pairs). The Kittiwake and Guillemot populations are of national importance. The site is also utilised by breeding Chough. A survey in 1992 recorded the presence of 3 breeding pairs, plus 7 flock birds; the birds nest on the cliffs and feed on the cliff top grassland and heath. Loop Head is also a traditional site for Peregrine.

Loop Head SPA is of high ornithological importance as it supports two seabird species, Kittiwake and Guillemot, with populations of national importance. Two species, Chough and Peregrine, which are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, breed here in small numbers.

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