

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SOVEREIGN ISLANDS SPA

SITE CODE: 004124

The Sovereign Islands are two very small marine islands located approximately 1 km off the coastline at the entrance to Oysterhaven Bay in Co. Cork. The islands are rocky stacks separated by a narrow sound of about 20 m width. The eastern island is flat-topped and rises to 24 m above sea level; the western one is more peaked and rises to 30 m. The geology is Lower Carboniferous limestones and shales. Both islands are largely devoid of soil apart from small amounts of organic matter trapped in cracks. Vegetation is sparse, with plants such as Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris*), Spurrey (*Spergularia* spp.) and Orache (*Atriplex* spp.) recorded. The surrounding sea, to a distance of 200 m, is included.

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

The islands are important for breeding seabirds, with most occurring on the eastern stack. A Cormorant colony has been known since the late 1960s and 156 pairs were recorded here in 1999. A more recent survey in 2008 recorded 89 pairs. Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull also breed, with 10 and 75 pairs respectively in 1999.

Sovereign Islands SPA is of ornithological importance mainly for the breeding colony of Cormorant, which is both the largest in Co. Cork and of national importance. The non-migratory population of Great Black-backed Gull is also of national importance.