

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: BALLYSadARE BAY SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004129**

Ballysadare Bay extends for approximately 10 km westwards from the town of Ballysadare, County Sligo. It is the most southerly of three inlets that form the eastern part of the larger Sligo Bay complex. The estuarine channel of the Ballysadare River winds its way through the bay, finally reaching the open sea near the Strandhill Dunes sand spit. The bay is underlain by sedimentary rocks of limestones, sandstones and shales which are exposed as low cliffs and small sections of bedrock shore at several locations.

The bay contains extensive intertidal sand and mudflats. The flats support good populations of macro-invertebrates which are important food items for wintering waterfowl. Common species present include the polychaete worms *Hediste diversicolor*, *Arenicola marina*, *Lanice conchilega* and *Nephtys hombergii*, and the bivalves *Cerastoderma edule*, *Macoma balthica* and *Scrobicularia plana*. Also present on the intertidal flats are the vascular plants Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and Beaked Tasselweed (*Ruppia maritima*), which provide food for herbivorous wildfowl. Well-developed salt marshes, which provide roosting sites for birds at high tide, occur at several locations around the bay. The sandy beaches around the Strandhill peninsula are used by roosting birds.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Light-bellied Brent Goose, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit and Redshank. 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.

Ballysadare Bay is important for a range of waterfowl species in autumn and winter. The population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (188) is of international importance (all figures are mean peak counts for four winters in the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000). The populations of four other species are of national importance, i.e. Grey Plover (70), Dunlin (1,420), Bar-tailed Godwit (251) and Redshank (435). A range of other species occurs, including Whooper Swan (15), Shelduck (55), Wigeon (617), Teal (179), Mallard (304), Goldeneye (17), Red-breasted Merganser (26), Cormorant (43), Oystercatcher (518), Ringed Plover (96), Golden Plover (301), Lapwing (467), Curlew (508), Greenshank (22), Turnstone (40), Black-headed Gull (261) and Common Gull (203).

Ballysadare Bay SPA is of high ornithological importance - it supports a Light-bellied Brent Goose population of international importance as well as nationally important populations of four other wintering waterfowl species. The presence of Bar-tailed Godwit, Golden Plover and Whooper Swan is of particular note as these species are

listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The site forms an important component of the larger Sligo Bay complex.

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