

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CLARE ISLAND SPA

SITE CODE: 004136

Clare Island lies at the entrance to Clew Bay, in Co. Mayo, and some 5 km from the mainland. The island has a diverse geology, being composed of Dalradian sandstones and shales, Carboniferous sandstones, shales and conglomerates, and a variety of Silurian rocks. The site comprises all of the cliffs on the island, a length of approximately 10 km, as well as the land adjacent to the cliff edge (inland for 300 m) and the adjacent marine waters (to distances of 200 m or 500 m, depending on auk distribution).

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

The cliffs on the northern coast consist of vertical precipices alternating with steep grassy slopes and huge blocks of rock. The vertical cliffs are up to 100 m high in places. The less sheer cliffs are well-vegetated with a maritime sward, including such species as Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*). A plantain (*Plantago*) sward occurs along the tops of some of the cliffs. The cliffs in the south-west and eastern sectors of the site are low-lying.

Clare Island is one of the most important seabird colonies in the country. It is of particular importance for Fulmar, supporting 4,029 pairs – this is the largest population in the country and represents 10% of the national population. It also has nationally important populations of Shag (89 pairs), Common Gull (39 pairs), Kittiwake (1,785 pairs), Guillemot (1,528 pairs) and Razorbill (354 pairs) – all seabird data from 1999. Black Guillemot, a resident species also occurs in nationally important numbers (62 individuals). Whilst the Gannet colony (3 pairs) has not grown to any extent since its establishment in the 1970s, it is still of significance in that it is one of only six in Ireland and the only colony on the west coast. Other breeding species include Puffin (48 pairs), Cormorant (32 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (24 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (14 pairs) and Herring Gull (23 pairs). Most of the seabird species appear to have increased since the last census in 1990, and the Cormorant colony has only become established since then. Herring Gull numbers, however, have decreased dramatically since 1982, reflecting a trend that has occurred throughout the country. It has been suspected in the past that Storm Petrel breeds on the island, but there have been no recent attempts to prove nesting.

Clare Island is an important stronghold for Chough, with 16 breeding pairs recorded in 2002/03. The island is also a traditional nesting site for Peregrine, with at least one pair present in most years.

The first main survey of the breeding seabirds of the island was carried out as part of the well-known 1909-11 Clare Island Survey. The 1999 survey was carried out as part of the 'New Survey of Clare Island'.

Clare Island is one of the top seabird sites in the country, having nationally important populations of seven species, including the largest population of Fulmar in the country. It is also of note for the diversity of breeding seabirds, with 13 species breeding regularly. The site also has a nationally important population of Chough and contains nesting Peregrine – the occurrence of these two species is of note as they are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.