

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: INISHMORE SPA

SITE CODE: 004152

Situated approximately 8 km off the south coast of County Galway, Inishmore (Árainn) is the largest of the three Aran Islands. Geologically an extension of the Burren, County Clare, the island is formed of Upper Carboniferous limestone strata, interleaved with layers of shale and clay. The site comprises all of the cliffs and rocky shore along the entire southern side of the island, part of the low cliffs/rocky shore at the west end, and the low cliffs/rocky shore at the east end - a distance of over 17 km of coastline. Also included are the two islands west of Inishmore (Brannock Island and Rock Island), Straw Island at the east end of Inishmore, the dune system at Barr na Coise, and the adjacent seas out to 500 m from the shoreline. The cliffs vary in height, being often less than 20 m but rising to over 80 m near Dún Aonghasa where they are notably sheer. Littoral and sublittoral reef communities are well-developed within the site.

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

The Inishmore SPA is an important site for breeding seabirds, especially cliff-nesting species. A survey in 1999 showed that it supported nationally important populations of Kittiwake (587 pairs) and Guillemot (2,312 pairs). Inishmore SPA is also of importance for breeding terns, with nationally important populations of Arctic Tern (338 pairs in 1995) and Little Tern (3 pairs in 1995, 13 pairs in 1999) occurring. The terns do not breed in the site every year but alternate with sites on nearby Inishmaan. Other breeding seabirds present include Fulmar (320 pairs), Razorbill (231 pairs), Shag (14 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (42 pairs), Herring Gull (27 pairs) and Black Guillemot (171 individuals). The Black Guillemot colony is one of the largest concentrations in the country, representing over 5% of the national total. Storm Petrel has been suspected of breeding but has never been proved.

Inishmore is an important stronghold for Peregrine (up to 4 pairs). Chough also breeds on the cliffs (6 pairs in 2003).

There is a long history of recording bird populations on the island, with records dating back to the 1830s.

The Inishmore SPA is an important site for breeding seabirds, with four migratory species having populations of national importance. Of note is that two of the seabird species, Arctic Tern and Little Tern, as well as the resident Peregrine and Chough, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

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