

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DINGLE PENINSULA SPA

SITE CODE: 004153

The Dingle Peninsula SPA is a large site situated on the west coast of Co. Kerry. It encompasses the high coast and sea cliff sections of the peninsula from just south of Brandon Point in the north, around to the end of the peninsula at Slea Head, and as far east as Inch in the south. The site includes the sea cliffs, the land adjacent to the cliff edge, areas of sand dune on the Magharees Peninsula and near Murreagh, and also several upland areas further inland of the coast about Ballybrack, Lough Doon, Anscaul Lough, Arraglen and Ballynane. The high water mark forms the seaward boundary. The site is underlain by a variety of sedimentary rock types of various ages, predominantly Devonian and Devonian/Silurian sandstones, conglomerates and siltstones, but also Ordovician mudstones, siltstones and breccias, and Silurian siltstones. An area of volcanic rocks of Silurian age is found about Clogher Head/Dunquin.

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

The site supports some of the highest densities in Ireland of breeding Chough, a Red Data Book species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The abundance of Chough on the Dingle Peninsula was first noted in the 1800s. When the first modern survey of Chough was undertaken in 1982 the species was seen to be still abundant there. Since then the high importance of the site for Chough has been demonstrated by surveys in 1992 and 2002/03 when 107 and 105 breeding pairs respectively were recorded within the SPA.

The topography of the Dingle Peninsula, with its mosaic of grazed semi-improved and improved pastures, extensive well-drained uplands, and sand dune systems in close proximity to breeding cliffs, favours Chough. Particularly high densities of Chough occur at Reenbeg in the south of the site, The Three Sisters in the north-west and Ballydavid Head in the north. Large post-breeding flocks gather, particularly in the autumn, at the dune systems at Castlegregory and Inch (which is included in an adjacent SPA). Marked individuals have provided evidence that young birds converge in these flocks from throughout the peninsula and it is possible that Chough gather in the dunes here from even further afield. Known roost sites within the SPA include a site on the Magharees Peninsula and a number of inland locations such as the cliffs at Anscaul Lough, Arraglen and Lough Doon. Flocks of up to 80 birds form in the mountains during the summer months. Studies have shown that Chough forage mainly within 300 m inland of the cliff tops used for breeding and these areas have been included in the site.

The site also supports nationally important populations of Peregrine (5 pairs in 2002) and Fulmar (1,016 pairs), as well as smaller populations of other breeding seabirds: Razorbill (3 pairs), Herring Gull (33 pairs), Lesser Black-backed Gull (2 pairs), Shag

(23 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (1 pair) – all seabird data from 1999-2000. The site also holds a population of Black Guillemot.

The Dingle Peninsula SPA is of ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important population of Chough. It also supports nationally important populations of Fulmar and Peregrine. The presence of Chough and Peregrine, both species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is of particular significance. Part of the Dingle Peninsula SPA is a Statutory Nature Reserve.