

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: IVERAGH PENINSULA SPA

SITE CODE: 004154

The Iveragh Peninsula SPA is a large site situated on the west coast of Co. Kerry. The site encompasses the high coast and sea cliff sections of the peninsula from just west of Rossbehy in the north, around to the end of the peninsula at Valencia Island and Bolus Head, and as far east as Lamb's Head in the south. The site includes the sea cliffs, the land adjacent to the cliff edge and also areas of sand dunes at Derrynane and Beginish. The high water mark forms the seaward boundary except at Doulus Head/Killelan Mountain where the adjacent sea area to a distance of 500 m from the cliff base is included. The site is underlain by Devonian sandstones, siltstones and mudstones. A small area of igneous rocks (dolerite and gabbro) occurs at Beginish and on the adjacent shore.

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

Vegetated sea cliffs dominate the site; these occur along the length of the site and support a good variety of plant species typical of the habitat, including Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) and Rock Sea-spurry (*Spergularia rupicola*). The cliff-tops support heath or coastal grassland. Apart from the sea cliffs themselves, the site includes areas of dry heath, wet heath, upland acid grassland, dense Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), semi-improved and improved pasture grassland, dune grassland, streams, bedrock shores and islets.

The site supports an important internationally population of breeding Chough, a Red Data Book species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive; 106 breeding pairs were recorded from the site in the 1992 survey and 88 in the 2002/03 survey. The birds are found around the coast from Lamb's head in the south-west to Rossbehy in the north. A small number of pairs are found inland, mainly around the Macgillycuddy's Reeks.

The topography of the Iveragh Peninsula, with its mosaic of grazed semi-improved and improved pastures, extensive inland upland areas of coastal heath and grassland, and sand dune systems in close proximity to breeding cliffs, favours Chough. Particularly high densities of Chough occur at Valencia Island where livestock grazing presents the species with widespread feeding opportunities. Valencia Island held the largest autumn flock, (42 birds), observed in the period 2002 to 2004. Choughs also benefit from the close proximity of the dune systems at Rossbehy in the north and at Inch, where flocks of up to 64 birds have been observed in the autumn. The smaller area of dune habitat at Derrynane is also used, with flocks of up to 33 birds present in October 2003. Communal roosts exist on Lamb's Head near

Derrynane and at the western tip of Valencia Island. Pairs and small flocks of Chough can be found around the coast and in the mountainous uplands of the Iveragh Peninsula throughout the year. Studies have shown that Chough forage mainly within 300 m of the cliff tops used for breeding and these areas have been included in the site.

The site supports an important Peregrine population (5 pairs in 2002). The site also holds nationally important populations of Guillemot (2,860 pairs in 1999-2000), Fulmar (766 pairs in 1999-2000) and Kittiwake (1,150 pairs in 2000). Other species recorded during the Seabird 2000 Survey include Great Black-backed Gull (63 pairs) and Black Guillemot (118 individuals), as well as smaller populations of other breeding seabirds: Razorbill (90 pairs), Herring Gull (30 pairs), Cormorant (33 pairs) and Shag (11 pairs).

The Iveragh Peninsula SPA is of ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important population of Chough and is the second most important site in the country for this species. The site also supports nationally important populations of Peregrine and three species of breeding seabirds Guillemot, Fulmar and Kittiwake. The presence of Chough and Peregrine, both species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, is of particular significance.