

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SLYNE HEAD TO ARDMORE POINT ISLANDS SPA

SITE CODE: 004159

The site includes a number of islands along the Connemara coast, Co. Galway, from Slyne Head to Kilkieran Bay. It is characterised by a large number of small, uninhabited islands, rocks and skerries. Some of the islands are up to 4 km from the mainland, whilst others are in very shallow waters close to the shoreline. The larger islands in the site include Inishlackan, Croaghnaकेला Island, St Macdara's Island, Masson Island, Birmore Island, Freaghillaun, Illaunamid and Illaunurra. Most of the larger islands support maritime grassland; machair occurs on Masson Island. The surrounding seas to a distance of 200 m, which are used as foraging areas by terns and other seabirds, are included 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: Barnacle Goose, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern and Little Tern.

The islands within the site support an internationally important wintering population of Barnacle Goose (646 – 4 survey mean between 1993 and 2003). Since 1993, aerial surveys have recorded between 523 (1993) and 875 (2003) birds within the site. The count in 2003 represented approximately 10% of the national total. The islands used by the geese include St Macdara's Island, Croaghnaकेला Island, Illaunacroagh More, Illaunacroagh Beg, Inishmuskerry and Birmore Island.

The site is also a traditional breeding area for a number of tern species, with nationally important populations of three species occurring, i.e. Sandwich Tern (126 pairs in 1995, or 4% of the All-Ireland population), Arctic Tern (582 pairs in 1995, approximately 19% of the All-Ireland total) and Little Tern (41 pairs in 1995, 24% of the All-Ireland total). Common Tern (24 pairs in 1995) and Roseate Tern (5 pairs in 1984) have also been recorded breeding within the site. The terns can use different islands between years.

Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Common Gull, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull have bred on various islands in the past but there is no recent survey information for these species.

Slyne Head to Ardmore Point Islands SPA is of high ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important Barnacle Goose population. It also has nationally important populations of three tern species, including the largest breeding population of Arctic Tern in the country. Barnacle Goose, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Little Tern, Common Tern and Roseate Tern are all listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

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