

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CONNEMARA ISLANDS cSPA

SITE CODE: 004159

The site includes islands and marine waters along the Connemara coast, Co. Galway, and extends from just west of Slyne Head eastwards to Cashla/Costelloe 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, Croaghnaकेela Island, St Macdara's Island, Masson Island, Finish Island, Illaunmore, Illaunneeragh West, Inishtravin, Illaunneerah, Inishbarra, Inchamakinna, Inisherik, Golam, Illaunnaownim, Birmore Island, Freaghillaun, Illaunamid, Illaunurra, amongst others. Most of the larger islands support maritime grassland; machair occurs on Masson Island. Surrounding seas, used as foraging areas by terns and other seabirds, are included within the site.

The site is a candidate Special Protection Area (cSPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Barnacle Goose, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern and Little Tern.

The islands within the site support an internationally important wintering population of Barnacle Goose (671 individuals recorded in 2023) which accounts for 5% of the national population (13,827 individuals – 2023 estimate) and more than 1% of the flyway population (62,159 individuals – 2023 estimate). Aerial surveys in 2013, 2018, 2020 and 2023 provide a four survey average population of 788 individuals. The islands traditionally used by the geese include St Macdara's Island, Croaghnaकेela 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 four species occurring, i.e. Sandwich Tern (131 pairs in 2023, or 3% of the All-Ireland population), Common Tern (76 pairs in 2023, approximately 1% of the All-Ireland population), Arctic Tern (43 pairs in 2023, approximately 1% of the All-Ireland total) and Little Tern (42 pairs in 2023, 13% of the All-Ireland total). 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 and Black Guillemot are known to have bred on various islands in this SPA over the years.

Connemara Islands cSPA is of high ornithological importance as it supports an internationally important Barnacle Goose population. It also has nationally important populations of four tern species. 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.

4.2.2026