

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: MID-CLARE COAST SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004182**

The Mid-Clare Coast SPA site extends along the Co. Clare coastline in a south-south-westerly direction from Spanish Point (3 km west of Milltown Malbay) to just west of Doonbeg Bay, a distance of some 14 km. It comprises the mainland shoreline, Mutton Island and Mattle Island, a series of rocky reefs and the open marine water of Mal Bay between the islands and the mainland. Underlying the site are Carboniferous grits which are bedded at a low angle and which give rise to surf conditions in places along the coast. The headlands and islands experience some of the most severe conditions of exposure in Ireland.

The mainland shoreline is mostly rocky or stony, though there are several sandy beaches and areas of intertidal flats. Shingle or stony banks are found at the base of cliffs and at the head of bays. The stretch of coastline between Quilty and Lurga Point has extensive areas of mud and sand flats and further intertidal flats occur at Doughmore Bay and Doonbeg Bay. Mutton Island is a medium-sized, uninhabited, island situated approximately 1 km from Lurga Point.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Cormorant, Barnacle Goose, Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin and Turnstone. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands, and as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

Mattle Island supports a nationally important breeding colony of Cormorant, with 60 nests present in May 1990. Both Mutton Island and Mattle Island have breeding Shag, estimated at less than 40 pairs in total in 1990. Both islands have nesting Herring Gull (probably less than 40 pairs) and Great Black-backed Gull (possibly up to 70 pairs), while Mutton Island has Lesser Black-backed Gull (24 pairs in 1995) and Common Gull (*c.* 10 pairs in 1995). Black Guillemot breeds, at least on Mutton Island (7 pairs in 1990).

Storm Petrel has long been known to breed on Mutton Island, though there has never been a quantitative estimate of the population size.

A nationally important population of Barnacle Goose (250 – 4 survey mean between 1993 and 2003) winters on Mutton Island, with birds occasionally visiting Mattle Island and feeding sites on the mainland. Mutton Island provides both feeding and roosting sites for the species.

The mainland shore is important for wintering waders, especially the internationally important population of Purple Sandpiper (393) and nationally important populations

of Ringed Plover (316), Dunlin (2,708), Sanderling (272) and Turnstone (571) – all figures are mean peaks for the 5 winters 1995/96 to 1999/2000. Other species which occur in winter include Golden Plover (1,446), Grey Plover (36), Oystercatcher (328), Lapwing (1,252), Curlew (486) and Redshank (77). Some of the waders may commute to the islands. The shallow seas are frequented by both Great Northern Diver (9) and Red-throated Diver (2).

The Mid-Clare Coast SPA is of high ornithological importance and supports an internationally important population of Purple Sandpiper, and nationally important populations of wintering Barnacle Goose and four wader species. In summer it is utilized by a range of breeding seabirds including a nationally important colony of Cormorant. Of particular note is that Barnacle Goose, Storm Petrel, Golden Plover, Great Northern Diver and Red-throated Diver are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of the Mid-Clare Coast SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.