

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: HORN HEAD TO FANAD HEAD SPA

SITE CODE: 004194

The Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA comprises a number of separate sections of the north Co. Donegal coastline stretching some 70 km eastwards from Dooros Point, south-west of Horn Head to just south of Saldanha Head, south of Fanad Head. The site includes the high coast areas and sea cliffs, land adjacent to the cliff edge and the sand dunes and lake at Dunfanaghy/Rinclevan. The high water mark forms the seaward boundary, except at Horn Head where the adjacent sea area to a distance of 500 m from the cliff base is included. Sea cliffs are present along virtually all the site. Almost all are greater than 10 m in height. They are often over 30 m and rise impressively to over 200 m in a few places. The geology consists of both metamorphic and igneous intrusive rocks. The metamorphic rocks are quartzites and schists. The igneous rocks are silica-rich granites and more the basic dolerites and granodiorites. A small low-lying peninsula of metamorphic limestone occurs at Cloonmass Point and Isle just north of the Ards peninsula.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Chough, Peregrine, Fulmar, Cormorant, Shag, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill, Greenland White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose. The site is also of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds.

The site holds an internationally important population of breeding Chough, a Red Data Book species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive; 20 breeding pairs were recorded from the site in the 1992 survey and 29 in the 2002/03 survey. The sea cliffs on the site provide breeding and roosting sites for the birds whilst the land adjacent to the cliff tops provides feeding habitat. A number of areas slightly further from the coast are used for feeding or flocking, e.g. at Black Burrow near Dooros Point and at Melmore Lough on the Tranarossan Peninsula. The site also holds a large Peregrine population (5 pairs in 2002).

The site is also used by a large assemblage and wide variety of nesting seabirds, the cliffs around Horn Head being of particular importance. The site supports nationally important populations of Fulmar (1,974 pairs), Cormorant (79 pairs), Shag (110 pairs), Kittiwake (3,853 pairs), Guillemot (4,387 pairs) and Razorbill (4,515 pairs). Other species that occur include Black Guillemot (204 individuals), Puffin (189 pairs), Herring Gull (21 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (5 pairs) and Common Gull (2 pairs) – all seabird data from 1999.

New Lake/Rinclevan and the dunes to the west (west-south-west of Dunfanaghy) support nationally important Greenland White-fronted Goose (231) and Barnacle Goose (187) populations - all figures are 5 year mean peaks, 1995/96-1999/2000. The Greenland White-fronted Goose flock has increased in size since the 1980s. These

are considered to be the birds that formerly frequented blanket bog sites in vicinity of the Calabber River valley. The Barnacle Goose flock is part of an internationally important population that also uses the islands of Inishbofin and Inishdooy. The geese feed on the dune grassland and on intensive grassland. Whooper Swan (31) also occurs regularly, along with a range of other waterfowl species, notably Pochard (234), which are well suited to the shallow lake waters. Other species present include Teal (109), Mallard (87), Tufted Duck (93), Goldeneye (11), Mute Swan (67) and Coot (52) – all figures are 5 year mean peaks for the period 1995/96-1999/2000.

In summer, the site supports a good diversity of breeding waders. A survey in 2009 recorded the following: Lapwing (10 pairs), Snipe (6 pairs), Redshank (1 pair) and Oystercatcher (1 pair). A survey in 1996 also recorded Dunlin (6 pairs) and Common Sandpiper (2 pairs) at the site.

The Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA is of high importance for Chough and Peregrine, both species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. It also supports an internationally important assemblage of breeding seabirds, that includes nationally important populations of six species, i.e. Fulmar, Cormorant, Shag, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill. The Greenland White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose populations are also of national importance. Both of these species, as well as Whooper Swan, are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. A good diversity of other wildfowl species occurs. Part of the Horn Head to Fanad Head SPA is a Wildfowl Sanctuary.