

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CASTLEMAINE HARBOUR

SITE CODE: 000343

This site is a large coastal site that encompasses a number of former Areas of Scientific Interest on the south-east corner of the Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry. It consists of the whole inner section of Dingle Bay - Castlemaine Harbour - the spits of Inch and White Strand and a little of the coastline to the north-west. Inland, sections of river channel are included to just beyond Killorglin in the south-east and almost to Castlemaine in the east.

The vast majority of the site consists of intertidal mudflats, supporting beds of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) in many places. A range of other habitats occurs around the edge of the site and although these have not been investigated in detail recently from a botanical point of view, in 1973 An Foras Forbartha provided the following details:

Inch Spit was said at that time to hold the finest sand dune left in Kerry; despite being considerably eroded. In the younger foredunes Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) was common, with Groundsel (*Seneis vulgaris*), Sa Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and Dandelions (*Taraxacum* sp.) also present. The fixed, more stable dunes supported Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Common Birds-Foot-Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Willy Pansy (*Viola tricolour*) and Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*) among others, while a number of areas of dune slack supported Creeping Bent (*Agrastis stolonifera*), Crested Dog's-Tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) and Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*). Beyond the dunes a salt marsh rich in Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and with frequent Saltwort-grass (*Puccinellia* sp.) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) occurs, reaching out into the mudflats. Inch dunes are today known to be the most intact in the region and the dune slacks particularly well-developed.

A smaller spit occurs on the southern shore, from where Yellow Century (*Cicendia filiformis*) and Knotted Pearlwort (*Sagina uodosa*) were recorded from a dune slack along with more common species.

Salt marsh occurs along the south-eastern shore and is dominated by Thrift Common Saltmarsh-Grass (*Puccinellia maritima*). Along the edge of channels reaching inland from here, Sea Club-Rush (*Scirpus maritimus*) and Common

Reed (*Phragmites australis*) are recorded.

In the extreme north-west of the site cliffs of glacial drift occur. At the base salt marsh occurs, while the higher faces support such plants as Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*). On top, a rough, dry grass with Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Woodsage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and others has developed.

In the Valley upstream of Killorglin, a wet woodland listed an outstanding example of *Salicetum alba - fragilis* is included in the site.

Five rare plants listed in the Irish Red Data Book have been recorded in the site, namely: Sea-Kale (*Crambe maritima*), Sea Pea (*Lathyrus juponi*), Corncrake (*Agrotis githago*), Peary Royal (*Mentha pulegium*) and Irish Lady's Teresa (*Spiranthes romanoffiana*). The latter two are protected under the 1987 Flora Protection Order. However, only Sea-Kale out of this list has been seen recently in the site. Two other common plants, Yellow Bartsia (*Parentacellia viscosa*) and Lax-flowered Sea-Lavender (*Limonium himalaicum*) occur here.

It is the ornithological aspect of the area that has received the most attention recently, as Castlemaine Harbour is of only a few species in Ireland that holds in excess of 20,000 individuals of waterfowl during winter. For this fact alone the site is of international importance, but two species achieve this status on their own - Brent Goos (773) and Bar-tailed Godwit (1,007). (Both average from 13 counts between 1984/5 and 1986/87). The following birds congregate at nationally important levels: Wigeon (3,547), Common Scoter (594), Red-breasted Merganser (53), Ringed Plover (288), Oystercatcher (1,178), Grey Plover (151), Knot (998), Dunlin (3,519), Redshank (427) and Turnstone (146). (All average peaks from 13 counts, 1984/85 - 1986/87).

The vicinity of Castlemaine Harbour is also important as one of only about three sites in Ireland - all in Kerry - of the Natterjack Toad, an amphibian listed in the Irish Red Data Book and in Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive.

In Annex II of the Directive is the Common Seal, a small colony of which occurs here also.

The cliffs in the north-west were reported by An Foras Forbartha as supporting a rare invertebrate species at its only known site in Ireland and formally the British Isles. Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) were recorded.

The most serious threats to the site would be erosion of

the dunes and pollution of the wetland. These should be guarded against.

Castlemaine Harbour is an NHA of international importance due to the presence of exceptional bird congregations, rare plants and habitats and a rare amphibian. The value of the area for conservation is reflected in the proposed Castlemaine Harbour SPA and in the facts Inch and Casltemaine Harbours are State Nature Reserves. Inch & Rosbehy are Wildlife Sanctuaries.