

1. Country: Ireland
2. Date: December 1995
3. Ref: 7IE026
4. Name of wetland: Dundalk Bay

Dundalk Bay, Co. Louth, is a very large open, shallow, sea bay with extensive saltmarshes and intertidal sand/mudflats, extending some 16km from Castletown River on the Cooley Peninsula in the north to Annagassan/Salterstown in the south. The bay encompasses the mouths/estuaries of the Rivers Dee, Glyde, Fane and Castletown, Ballymascanlan Bay (an annex to Dundalk Harbour) is included in the site.

The saltmarshes are in four main areas: Lurgangreen, Marsh South, Dundalk Harbour and Bellurgan. These are dominated by wide expanses of Townsend's Cord-grass (*Spartina townsendii*), while Sea Purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*) is common along the numerous channels. Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*) is also abundant in places. The saltmarshes at Lurgangreen and Marsh South are partially fenced and grazed by sheep.

Between the saltmarsh fringes the high tide line is often marked by a shingle beach with Sea Mayweed (*Matricaria maritima*), Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris*) and Sea Radish (*Raphanis maritimus*).

The extensive sand banks and mudflats (over 4,000 ha) have a rich fauna of bivalve molluscs, marine worms and crustaceans, which are hardly exploited by people but are the main food resource of the tens of thousands of waterfowl (mainly ducks, Brent Geese, waders and gulls) which feed in the intertidal area of Dundalk Bay. The saltmarshes are used as high-tide roosts by all these species, while the grazing birds (notably Brent Geese and Wigeon) feed on the saltmarsh grasses and other vegetation. The Brent Geese also feed on the mats of green algae on the mudflats. At night the wintering Greylag and Greenland White-fronted Geese, and Whooper Swans, from Stabannan/Braganstown (inland from Castlebelligham) roost in Dundalk Bay.

The Red Data Book species, *Crambe maritima*, occurs at the site.

The site is internationally important for waterfowl on the basis of two criteria, (a) it regularly holds over 20,000 birds (up to 57,000 have been recorded), (b) it supports over 1% of the NW European/E Atlantic Flyway populations of Brent Geese, Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Knot. Additionally, it is nationally important for Greylag Geese, Shelduck, Teal, Pintail, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwits, Curlew and Redshanks.

The site has been designated a Special Protection Area under the EU Directive on the conservation of wild birds.