

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CLIFFS OF MOHER SPA

SITE CODE: 004005

This site extends a distance of some 9.5 km along the north Clare coast from Faunmore in the north to just south of Cancregga Point in the south. The cliffs, which rise to 203 m in height, are formed of horizontal beds of coal measure sandstones and shales. Cleavage in the rock is so good that the term flagstone has been applied, and the Liscannor Flag is the rock type best exposed in a quarry near Hag's Head. The line of cliffs shows faulting and slumping to good effect but these are difficult to observe from the cliff top. The site includes the cliffs, the land adjacent to the cliff edge (inland for 300 m) as well as the adjacent sea area to a distance of up to 500 m from the cliff base; marine waters are included to provide areas for foraging and socialising activities for breeding seabirds.

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

The sheer cliffs are largely unvegetated, though some wide slopes support a Fescue (*Festuca*) sward. The scarce Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) occurs on the cliffs. The cliff-top vegetation is a typical maritime sward, including such species as Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Sea Campion (*Silene vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*). An interesting lichen flora has been recorded from the cliffs.

The horizontally-layered flagstones of the cliff face provide ideal nesting ledges for seabirds, and the colony is of International Importance. A survey in 1999 recorded the following: Fulmar (3,566 pairs), Kittiwake (7,698 pairs), Guillemot (13,375 pairs), Razorbill (5,159 pairs) and Puffin (1,365 pairs). The Razorbill population is of International Importance and the populations of the other listed species are of National Importance. In addition, small numbers of Shag (31 pairs), Herring Gull (10 pairs), Great Black-backed Gull (3 pairs) and Black Guillemot (4 individuals) breed. The seabirds utilise the marine area of the site for purposes of foraging, bathing and socialising.

Breeding Peregrine (2 pairs) and Chough (12 pairs in 2002/2003), both species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, are recorded on the cliffs. Studies have shown that Chough forage mainly within 350 m inland of the cliff edge.

This site is one of the most important seabird colonies in the country, with Razorbill having an Internationally Important population and a further four species having populations of National Importance. The site holds the largest Kittiwake and Razorbill colonies in the country, and probably the second largest Fulmar colony

(after Clare Island). The presence of two species that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive adds to the importance of the site. Owing to the importance of the bird populations, the site was designated as a Refuge for Fauna in 1988.