

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ERRIS HEAD

SITE CODE: 001501

This site is situated on the northern part of the Mullet Peninsula in north Mayo. It comprises approximately 15 km of cliff plus adjoining habitats. The geology of the region consists of acid rocks, such as quartzite, gneiss and Silurian schists and slates.

The sea cliffs, which represent a habitat listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, are very exposed and subject to very high rainfall. They are of moderate height, reaching a maximum of about 90 m in the north-east. Aspect is predominantly north-facing. There is little information available on the vegetation of the cliffs but the known presence of species such as Roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) and Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) suggest that there is a fairly typical cliff vegetation for such an exposed site. An area of sea, which extends 200 m from the base of the cliffs, forms part of the site. This is included mainly to provide added protection for the cliff-nesting seabirds.

A notable habitat found at this site is alpine heath, which occurs inland from the tops of the sea cliffs. Alpine heath is listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. Typical heath species present include Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). The alpine heath is considered to be of good quality.

The alpine heath grades into a coastal grassland in places, and coastal grassland forms the main terrestrial habitat at the southern part of the site. Other habitats present include wet heath and flushes. Here, plant species present include Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*), Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) and three types of Sundew (*Drosera* spp.).

The site is of ornithological importance for a number of species. Chough frequents the site and in 1992 nine pairs were recorded breeding. Peregrine Falcon also breeds, while small numbers (<20) of Barnacle Goose utilise the grasslands in winter. These three species are of note as they are listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. There is a scattering of breeding seabirds though no major colonies. The main seabirds which breed are Fulmar (50-100 pairs, 1970) and Great Black-backed Gull (38 pairs, 1970).

Grey Seals may be seen feeding below the cliffs, while on land two Red Data Book species, the Irish Hare and the Common Frog, are among the more notable animals which occur.

Landuse at the site consists mainly of sheep grazing, which appears not to be excessive. The area is also a popular location for tourists, especially those interested in walking.

This site is of conservation importance primarily for the cliff and alpine heath habitats, both of which are listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. The presence of several Annex I Bird Directive species and some breeding seabirds adds to the interest of the site.