

The South Wexford Coast

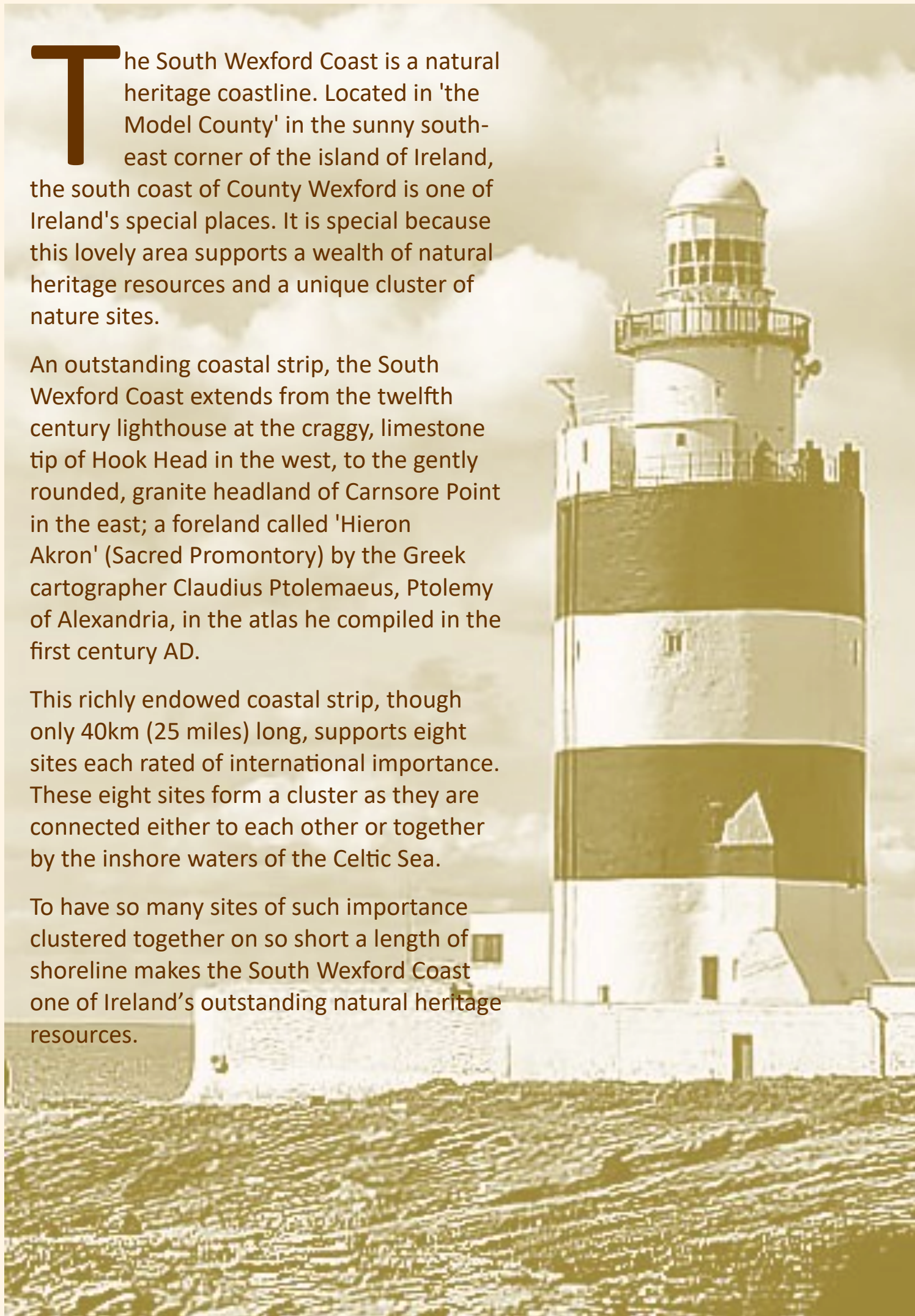
A natural heritage coastline

The South Wexford Coast is a natural heritage coastline. Located in 'the Model County' in the sunny south-east corner of the island of Ireland, the south coast of County Wexford is one of Ireland's special places. It is special because this lovely area supports a wealth of natural heritage resources and a unique cluster of nature sites.

An outstanding coastal strip, the South Wexford Coast extends from the twelfth century lighthouse at the craggy, limestone tip of Hook Head in the west, to the gently rounded, granite headland of Carnsore Point in the east; a foreland called 'Hieron Akron' (Sacred Promontory) by the Greek cartographer Claudius Ptolemaeus, Ptolemy of Alexandria, in the atlas he compiled in the first century AD.

This richly endowed coastal strip, though only 40km (25 miles) long, supports eight sites each rated of international importance. These eight sites form a cluster as they are connected either to each other or together by the inshore waters of the Celtic Sea.

To have so many sites of such importance clustered together on so short a length of shoreline makes the South Wexford Coast one of Ireland's outstanding natural heritage resources.





Ireland's Great Barrier Coast

The South Wexford Coast is an excellent example of a barrier coastline.

A barrier is a ridge of sediment. The south Wexford barriers are part of the legacy of the last ice age. Towards the end of the last ice age, off-shore, wave-worked gravels, sands and stones formed ridges parallel to the coast. As the ice sheets melted and retreated, as meltwater poured southwards and as sea level rose, tidal action caused these sediment ridges to move landwards and abut against the mainland as barriers.

Today, the barriers face the direction of the prevailing weather from the south-west. They are anchored on the rocky headlands at Forlorn Point and Carnsore Point, but their free-standing portions are still moving inland.

The image above shows part of the barrier coastline looking westwards. The barrier is the vegetated ridge in the middle, the Celtic Sea is to the south (left) with the Saltee Islands visible, and the southern extremity of Lady's Island Lake, a lagoon, is on right.

The Three Lagoons

A lagoon is an expanse of shallow water of varying salinity and water volume, wholly or partially separated from the sea by a barrier. The south Wexford barriers impound three coastal lagoons. The gravel in the barriers allows water to percolate both landwards and seawards thereby altering both the salinity and the volume of the lagoons. The lagoon basins are interpreted as the remains of glacial outwash channels and/or glacial lakes from the last ice age. The South

Wexford Coast supports three coastal lagoons: Ballyteige Channels (12.6ha), Tacumshin Lake (393.0ha) and Lady's Island Lake (299.6ha). Tacumshin Lake and Lady's Island Lake are the largest lagoons in Ireland and together, the three south Wexford lagoons comprise 29.09% of the country's coastal lagoon heritage.

Mounds of sand

The fringing gravel barriers on the South Wexford Coast are topped with a decoration of wind-blown sand trapped by salt-tolerant grasses. The sand forms impressive tall dunes on the Ballyteige Burrow barrier, only low, hummocky dune fields on the Tacumshin Lake barrier and just a ridge with a few very small dunes on the barrier impounding Lady's Island Lake and extending to Carnsore Point. Opportunities for further dune building are limited due to lack of building material; the sediments that were deposited by ice sheets are a finite resource.

The very impressive fringing gravel barriers, the sand dunes that decorate them, and the extensive coastal lagoons trapped behind them are all exceptional areas rich in wildlife and are the most important habitats found on the South Wexford Coast.



The Natura 2000 network

Natura 2000 is a European network of over 27,000 nature conservation sites found throughout the territories of the member states of the European Union (EU). On-going development of the network is the centrepiece of EU policy with regard to the conservation of nature and biodiversity.



SPAs and SACs

Natura 2000 sites may be either Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for wild birds or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for the habitats and species they support.

There are eight Natura 2000 sites on the South Wexford Coast: one SPA only, two SACs only, and five sites with dual SPA/SAC designation.

Natura 2000 site	Type and code	
	SPA	SAC
1 Hook Head	-	IE0000764
2 Bannow Bay	IE0004033	IE0000697
3 Keeragh Islands	IE0004118	-
4 Ballyteige Burrow	IE0004020	IE0000696
5 Saltee Islands	IE0004002	IE0000707
6 Tacumshin Lake	IE0004092	IE0000709
7 Lady's Island Lake	IE0004009	IE0000704
8 Carnsore Point	-	IE0002269

When a site has a dual SPA/SAC designation the areas involved may differ, for example, the Saltee Islands SPA designation covers the two islands for their seabirds, whereas the Saltee Islands SAC designation covers a large area of seabed around the islands for its marine habitats.

What are habitats?

Habitats are places that support wildlife. The Saltee Islands are a well-known habitat for seabirds, cliff vegetation, sea cave life, Grey Seals and marine plants and animals.

The 1992 EU Habitats Directive sets out obligations on member states to protect vulnerable habitats. Annex 1 of the Directive lists 233 natural habitats



found in the territories of member states that are of Community interest and that require the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); 58 of these Annex 1 habitats occur in Ireland and 17 of them are qualifying features of interest on the South Wexford Coast.

Nature conservation

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), one of the technical services of the Department of Housing, Local Government and



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

Heritage, is the government agency in Ireland with overall responsibility for managing Natura 2000 sites. The NPWS website at www.npws.ie gives descriptions of all SPAs and SACs together with maps, aerial photographs and other useful information. The NPWS contact person for the South Wexford Coast is Hazel Doyle, Conservation Ranger, mobile 085 805 4304, email Hazel.Doyle@npws.gov.ie.

Natura 2000 sites are listed in the *Wexford County Development Plan* and the *County Wexford Biodiversity Action Plan*, both policy documents of Wexford County Council. Both documents may be accessed at www.wexfordcoco.ie. Via its function as the local planning authority, Wexford County Council is a major player in conserving Natura 2000 sites in county Wexford.



South Wexford Coast

The South Wexford Coast is a richly endowed coastal strip. Though only 40km (25 miles) long, it supports eight Natura 2000 sites. These eight sites are connected either to each other or together by the inshore waters of the Celtic Sea.

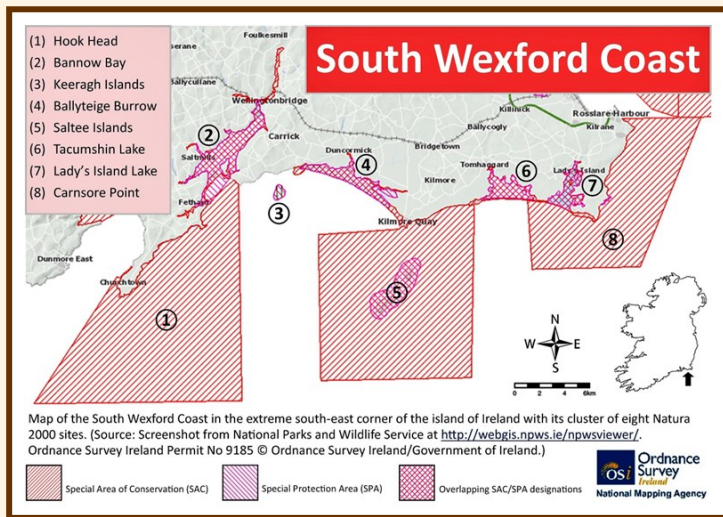
To have so many sites of such importance clustered together on so short a length of shoreline makes the South Wexford Coast one of Ireland's outstanding natural heritage resources.

The eight Natura 2000 sites on the South Wexford Coast are selected as protected areas for the following qualifying features of interest:

- 17 habitats annexed in the EU Habitats Directive,
- 37 wild birds annexed in the EU Birds Directive together with wetland and waterbirds in general, and
- Grey Seal, annexed in the EU Habitats Directive.



Thumb-nail sketches of the eight Natura 2000 sites on the South Wexford Coast are given below; full details may be



accessed at www.npws.ie.

Two of the habitats found on the South Wexford Coast are rated 'priority habits', that is, habitats identified as being the most threatened and requiring special conservation action: Natura 2000 code number 1150 'Coastal lagoons'



and number 2130 'Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)'. Coastal lagoons are features of interest in the SACs at Ballyteige Burrow, Tacumshin Lake and Lady's Island Lake and grey dunes are features of interest in the SACs at Bannow Bay and Ballyteige

Burrow.

Concerns about nature conservation should be addressed to Hazel Doyle, Conservation Ranger, mobile 085 805 4304, email Hazel.Doyle@npws.gov.ie.

To contribute to the growing wealth of information about Ireland's biodiversity, you are invited to submit records of any plants or animals you see to the Waterford-based National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland's citizen science portal at <https://biodiversityireland.ie/>.

1. Hook Head.

Hook Head is of international importance for its outstanding fossils and geological formations. The tip of the headland and its cliffs are popular spots for sea watching for migrant birds, whales and dolphins. The clear waters, reefs and rock pools teem with marine life



supporting excellent, species-rich examples of tide-swept communities. Baginbun Head has cliff-nesting birds. A fine example of the

Courtmacsherry raised beach may be seen at Wood Village. Hook Head and a large area of adjoining seabed are Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000764 for vegetated sea cliffs, intertidal and offshore reefs and the seabed that is rich in marine life.



2. Bannow Bay.

Bannow Bay is an excellent example of an enclosed estuarine system. The very extensive sand flats and mudflats exposed at low water attract a great diversity of wetland birds in winter including an internationally-



important population of Light-bellied Brent Geese. Saltmarshes of exceptional species diversity are found above the mudflats and support Perennial Glasswort, a plant that is confined in Ireland to the South

Wexford Coast. Tintern Abbey has excellent woodland trails and important colonies of breeding bats. Bannow Bay is Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004033



for thirteen named species of geese, ducks, waders together with wetland and waterbirds in general. The site is also Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000697 for eleven wetland and sand dune habitats.

3. Keeragh Islands.

Between May and September, the two, tiny, low-lying Keeragh Islands hold a large, nationally-important colony of breeding Great Cormorants. In winter, the predator-free islands are an important and safe night roost for wildfowl and other birds. Both islands are surrounded by a wide, boulder-strewn rock platform that supports a diversity of seaweeds. The Keeragh Islands are Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004118 for Great Cormorants.



4. Ballyteige Burrow.

Ballyteige Burrow is one of the most impressive shingle-



Wild Asparagus in fruit

based dune systems in Ireland. The fixed dunes support several declining plant communities, rare species of lichen and flowering plants and scarce insects that benefit from the southerly location, the abundance of sand, and the highest mean daily duration of bright sunshine recorded in Ireland. The dunes support

the largest population of Wild Asparagus in Ireland and Scrambled-egg Lichen that has been recorded nowhere else in the country. The site also supports a coastal lagoon, mudflats and estuary. The Cull is a wetland rich in waders and waterfowl. The hind-dune slob or polder provides feeding from Whooper Swans in winter. Kilmore Quay is noted for its outcrops of ancient rocks that are among the oldest found in Ireland. The Kilmore Quay Walking Trail runs behind the dunes and along the beach, and St Clomaun's Way explores the hazel wood at



Bee Orchid

Duncormick.

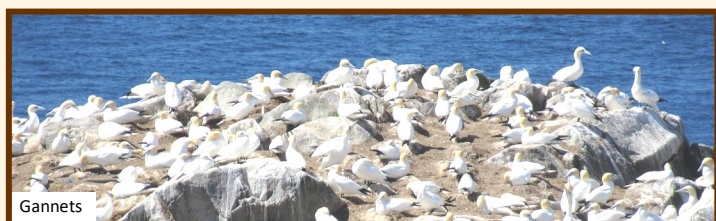
Ballyteige Burrow is Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004020 for seven named species of



Dunlin bathing

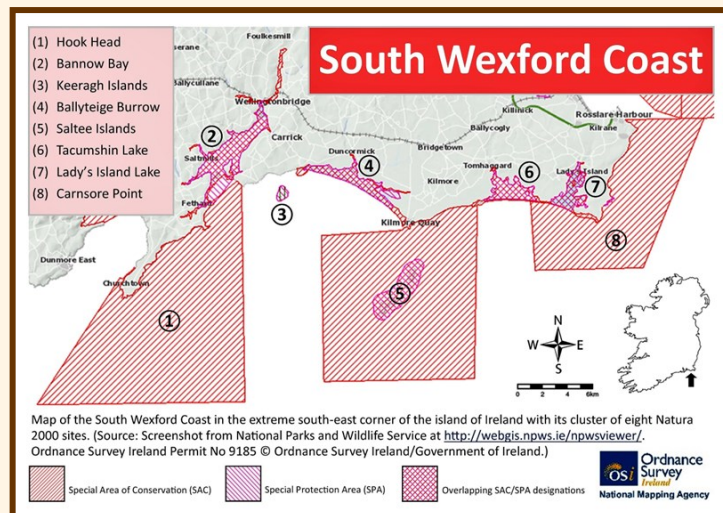
geese, ducks and waders and wetland and waterbirds in general. The site is also Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000696 for thirteen wetland and sand dune habitats of good quality making the site an area of major ecological value.

5. Saltee Islands.



Gannets

The two Saltee Islands, lying some 5km offshore, are numbered among the best-known seabird sanctuaries in north-west Europe. They are internationally important for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 breeding seabirds,



are easily accessible and are one of the best-documented sites in the country. Saltee Island Great is also a major site for spring and autumn land bird, butterfly and moth migration. Grey Seals breed there and the underwater marine life around the



Grey Seal pup

islands is both very diverse and of exceptional quality. The communities present are excellent examples of those typical of tide-swept areas and many have fauna and flora that are tolerant of sand scour. No other area in Ireland surveyed during the BioMar Survey had so many species rich communities. The Saltee Islands are Special Protection



Bracken crozier

Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004002 for ten named species of seabirds. The site is also Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000707 for its marine habitats, including reefs, sea caves and vegetated cliffs, and for the Grey Seals that congregate to breed around the islands each autumn.

6. Tacumshin Lake.

Tacumshin Lake is a coastal lagoon annexed as a priority habitat in the EU Habitats Directive. The lagoon is located behind Ireland's Great Barrier Coast, one of the finest barrier coastlines in Europe, is a haven for wildfowl and wading birds and is one of the most important



Leatherback Turtle



Bumblebee on Sea Holly

ornithological sites in Ireland. The occurrence of internationally important populations of Whooper Swan and Black-tailed Godwit is of especial note. The site is of special conservation interest for holding an assemblage of over 20,000 wintering

waterbirds. The waterfowl population of the lagoon is exceptionally diverse, and the area supports large numbers of birds throughout the year, which is unusual among Irish wetlands. The site is notable for passage waders and vagrant North American and Eurasian waterfowl.

Tacumshin Lake is a Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004092 for fourteen

named species of grebe, swans, ducks, waders and other wetland and waterbirds. The site is Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000709 for its lagoon, sand dunes and other barrier habitats.



Essex Skipper

7. Lady's Island Lake.



Colonial bryozoan

Lady's Island Lake is among the biggest and best examples in Ireland of a sedimentary lagoon. The site supports an exceptional diversity of plant and animal life and at least 13 lagoonal specialist species, the highest number for any lagoonal habitat in the country. The

critically endangered Cottonweed plant survives on the barrier and is not found growing anywhere else in Ireland. The largest mixed colony of breeding terns in Ireland is



Lagoon barnacles and Sea Mat

found on islands in the lake together with a large colony of Black-headed Gulls. The site has

one of the highest diversities of breeding wildfowl species in the country and is of high conservation importance. It is a Special Protection Area (SPA) Site Code IE0004009 for terns, gulls, Gadwall, and other wetland and waterbirds and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code IE0000704 for its lagoon, its reefs and barrier habitats.

8. Carnsore Point.

Carnsore Point, the south-eastern cornerstone of the island of Ireland, is a hotspot for watching seabirds on passage and is part of a large offshore underwater area protected for its reefs and species-rich marine life. The intertidal and offshore reefs are formed of Carnsore



Orange Lichen

granite, a coarse pinkish-brown rock, and range from very exposed to moderately exposed to wave action. In water at depths of 11-30m there are excellent examples of sea squirt communities. The reefs and other marine habitats are of considerable conservation significance as they support a number of species with a limited distribution in Ireland; together they comprise Special Area of Conservation

(SAC) Site Code IE0002269.



Cottonweed



By-the-wind Sailor



Portuguese Man o' War

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Words and pictures by Jim Hurley, SWC Promotions.

SWC Promotions



Promoting the South Wexford Coast

Email: southwexfordcoast@gmail.com

Mobile: 086 163 7199

Website: www.southwexfordcoast.com

Address: Grange, Kilmore, Co Wexford, Y35 YN35, Ireland.