

## EC DIRECTIVE 79/409 ON THE CONSERVATION OF WILD BIRDS

### RATHLIN ISLAND SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

Area: 3344.62 hectares

Geographic co-ordinates: 06° 13' 30" W  
55° 17' 30" N

The Rathlin Island Special Protection Area (SPA) is classified as an extension to, and renaming of, a previously classified SPA ie Rathlin Island Cliffs SPA. The new site includes the area of coast previously covered by the Rathlin Island Cliffs SPA plus an area of sea around the island and the new site boundary is now entirely coincident with the boundary of the Rathlin Island Special Area of Conservation.

The extension includes an area of sea around the island which is used by many of those seabirds which occur the island's coast.

Rathlin Island is a large inhabited marine island situated some 4km from the north Antrim coast of Northern Ireland. There are basalt and chalk cliffs, some as high as 100 metres, as well as several sea stacks on the north and west shores of the island. The south and east shores are more gently sloping with areas of maritime grassland and rocky shore. The length of the coastline is approximately 30km.

Rathlin Island Special Protection Area qualifies under Article 4.1 of EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds by supporting nationally important numbers of the Annex 1 species Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. The mean for years 1992-1996 is 6 breeding pairs (2% of the Irish population).

Recently up to 5 pairs of the Annex 1 species Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* have also bred on the site and the site contributes to the maintenance of the Chough range in the UK.

The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive by supporting internationally important breeding numbers of the following migratory species: Razorbill *Alca torda*, Guillemot *Uria aalge* and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. The most recent complete seabird census was carried out in 1985 and the following numbers of individuals of the above species were recorded: Razorbill 8,922 (4.8% International population, 17.8% of the Irish population) and Guillemot 41,887 (3.4%, 41.8%). A total of 6,822 pairs of Kittiwake were also recorded representing 1.2% of the international population and 15.1% of the Irish population.

The site also qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting over 20,000 breeding seabirds. The 1985 census indicated an assemblage of approximately 66,000 breeding birds on Rathlin Island.

The 1985 census also indicated the following breeding species as being of All-Ireland importance: Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* (1,482 pairs – 7.4% of the Irish population), Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* (109 prs. – 3.6%), Eider *Somateria mollissima* (40 prs. – 16%), Common Gull *Larus canus* (64 prs. – 1.8%), Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (4,037 prs. – 9.4%), Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (155 prs. – 2.3%), Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle* (144 individuals – 8.2%) and Puffin *Fratercula arctica* (2,398 ind. – 5.3%).

The sites also regularly supports breeding Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*.

The Register of European Sites in Northern Ireland

Register reference number UK9020011

Date of registration 1 March 1995

Signed   
on behalf of the Department of the Environment  
for Northern Ireland