

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds: Citation for Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Copeland Islands Special Protection Area

Unitary Authority/County: Ards Borough Council
County Down

Consultation proposal: Copeland Islands Area of Special Scientific Interest has been selected for classification as a Special Protection Area because of its important breeding and wintering populations of seabirds and waterfowl.

Site description: The Copeland Islands site comprises three islands (Copeland Island, referred to as Big Copeland, together with Light House Island and Mew Island), together with associated islets, off the north-east Co. Down coast and close to the entrance to Belfast Lough. The site encompasses the islands down to the low water mark, excluding buildings and associated structures. It includes rocky shores together with limited areas of sand/mud and cobble/boulder beaches. Terrestrial habitats include saltmarsh, freshwater marsh, maritime grassland, limited extent of inland cliff and semi-improved agricultural grassland. The principal interests are the breeding colonies of Manx Shearwater and Arctic Tern. The boundary of the Special Protection Area site is entirely coincident with the Copeland Islands Area of Special Scientific Interest.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 201.52 ha.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **Article 4.1** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting nationally important populations of the following species:

Annex 1 species	Count and Season	Period	% population GB
Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	566 pairs – breeding	5 year mean (1998 - 2002)	22.6 % Irish population

Bird figures from: Seabird 2000 census and annual counts co-ordinated by Copeland Bird Observatory

The site also qualifies under **Article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting internationally important populations of the following species:

Species	Count and Season	Period	% of population
Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	4800 pairs – breeding	Total survey (2000 – 2002)	1.7% world population

Bird figures from: Seabird 2000 census WeBS database

Non-qualifying species of interest

The islands host a nationally important breeding population of Eider Duck *S. mollissima* with some 140 pairs representing 14% of the Irish population.

The breeding birds contribute to the non-breeding flock of Eider *S. mollissima* that form part of the nationally important population that occurs along the Outer Ards SPA and Belfast Lough SPA. Counts of more than 200 duck are regular on Big Copeland especially, being some 10% of the Irish population.

Big Copeland supports Northern Ireland's first confirmed breeding pair of Mediterranean Gull *L. melanocephalus*. Breeding pairs were present in 2002 and again in 2003. Copeland Islands have held between 50% and 100% of the Irish breeding population.

The Islands also support a nationally important population of Common Gull *L. canus* with some 250 pairs present, being some 7% of the Irish population. The site is the most important breeding location for this species in Northern Ireland.

Status of SPA

Copeland Islands Special Protection Area was classified as a Special Protection Area on date (Day, Month, Year).