National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Greers Isle SPA 004082



07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 1 of 12

National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,

90 King Street North, Dublin 7, D07 N7CV, Ireland.

Web: www.npws.ie E-mail: natureconservation@npws.gov.ie

Citation:

NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Greers Isle SPA 004082. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Series Editors: Maria Long and Colin Heaslip
ISSN 2009-4086

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 2 of 12

Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Notes/Guidelines:

- 1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.
- 2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.
- 3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.
- 4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.
- 5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 3 of 12

Qualifying Interests

* indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive

004082	Greers Isle SPA	
A179	Black-headed Gull Chroicocephalus ridibundus	
A182	Common Gull Larus canus	
A191	Sandwich Tern Sterna sandvicensis	

Please note that this SPA overlaps with Mulroy Bay SAC (002159). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the overlapping site as appropriate.

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 4 of 12

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: www.npws.ie/Publications

NPWS Documents

Year: 2001

Title: The 16th Annual Report on the breeding performance at Inch Island in Lough Swilly

Author: Perry, K.W.; Speer, A.
Series: Unpublished Report

Year: 2002

Title: The 17th Annual Report on the breeding performance at colonies in Mulroy Bay and Lough

Swilly

Author: Perry, K.W.; Speer, A.
Series: Unpublished Report

Year: 2003

Title: The 18th Annual Report on the breeding performance at Inch Island in Lough Swilly

Author: Perry, K.W.; Speer, A.
Series: Unpublished Report

Year: 2004

Title: The 19th Annual Report on the breeding performance at Inch Island in Lough Swilly

Author: Perry, K.W.; Speer, A.
Series: Unpublished Report

Year: 2021

Title: Estimated foraging ranges of the breeding seabirds of Ireland's marine special protected area

network

Author: Power, A.; McDonnell, P.; Tierney, T.D.

Series: Published NPWS report

Other References

Year: 1985

Title: The 1984 all Ireland tern survey

Author: Whilde, A.

Series: Irish Birds 3: 1-32

Year: 1997

Title: The status and distribution of breeding sandwich, roseate, common, arctic and little terns in

Ireland in 1995

Author: Hannon, C.; Berrow, S.D.; Newton, S.F.

Series: Irish Birds, 6: 1-22

Year: 2003

Title: Implications for seaward extensions to existing breeding seabird colony Special Protection

Areas

Author: McSorley, C.A.; Dean, B.J.; Webb, A.; Reid J.B.

Series: JNCC Report No. 329

Year: 2004

Title: Seabird populations of Britain and Ireland

Author: Mitchell, P.I.; Newton, S.F.; Ratcliffe, N.; Dunn, T.E.

Series: Poyser, London

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 5 of 12

Year: 2010

Title: How Representative is the Current Monitoring of Breeding Seabirds in the UK?

Author: Cook, A.S.C.P.; Robinson, R.A.

Series: BTO Research Report No. 573

Year: 2019

Title: Desk-based revision of seabird foraging ranges used for HRA screening

Author: Woodward, I.; Thaxter, C.B.; Owen, E.; Cook, A.S.C.P.

Series: BTO Research Report No. 724

Year: 2020

Title: Black-headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (J. del

Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors)

Author: Burger, J.; Gochfeld, M.; Kirwan, G. M.; Christie, D. A; Garcia, E. F. J.

Series: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA

Year: 2020

Title: Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (S. M. Billerman,

Editor)

Author: Shealer, D.; Liechty, J. S.; Pierce, A. R.; Pyle, P.; Patten., M. A.

Series: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA

Year: 2021

Title: Common Gull (Larus canus), version 1.1. In Birds of the World (S. M. Billerman, Editor)

Author: Moskoff, W.; Bevier, L.R.; Rasmussen, P.C.

Series: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA

Year: 2023

Title: Seabirds Count: a census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015-2021)

Author: Burnell, D.; Perkins, A.J.; Newton, S.F.; Bolton, M.; Tierney, T.D.; Dunn, T.E.

Series: Lynx Nature Books, Barcelona

Year: 2024

Title: Seabird Population Trends and Causes of Change: 1986–2023, the annual report of the

Seabird Monitoring Programme

Author: Harris, S.J.; Baker, H.; Balmer, D.E.; Bolton, M.; Burton, N.H.K.; Caulfield, E.; Clarke, J.A.E.;

Dunn, T.E.; Evans, T.J.; Hereward, H.R.F.; Humphreys, E.M.; Money, S.; O'Hanlon, N.J.

Series: BTO Research Report 771

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 6 of 12

Conservation Objectives for : Greers Isle SPA [004082]

A179 Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Black-headed Gull in Greers Isle SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Breeding population size	Number of Apparently Occupied Nests (AON)	Long term SPA population trend is stable or increasing	Black-headed Gull have been breeding at the site since at least 1984. Approximately 200 pairs of Black-headed Gull bred at this SPA in 2002 (Mitchel et al., 2004). At this time it was observed that vegetation growth had made large parts of the island unsuitable for breeding birds (Perry and Speer, 2002). In 2004, it was noted that there was significant collapse in the number of breeding Black headed Gull within the SPA. The site has not been surveyed in recent years. American Mink <i>Neogale vison</i> has been recorded at this site and may have had an impact on the breeding success of Blackheaded Gull at this SPA
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per breeding pair	Sufficient to maintain a stable or increasing population	There was no productivity data available for this species in this SPA. Additionally, a lack of comprehensive Irish data precludes the identification of a minimum productivity rate for this species at the national level. Productivity values for both coastal and inland nesting Black-headed Gull in Britain have fluctuated markedly since 1986, and it is difficult to determine what a sustainable productivity rate for this species is. Differences in productivity likely reflect site level differences such as predation, food supply, and weather conditions. In 2023, 0.46 chicks fledged per pair in Scotland but this was 0.22 for the United Kingdom. Productivity rates reached over 1.0 for some years between 1996 to 2004 (Harris et al., 2024). It is likely that the presence of mink at this site had a significant impact on the productivity of this species
Distribution: extent of available nesting options within the SPA	Numbers and spatial distribution	Sufficient availability of suitable nesting sites throughout the SPA to maintain a stable or increasing population	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable nesting habitat for the breeding population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas may vary through time. This will affect the spatiotemporal patterns of use of the habitats by Blackheaded Gull. Black-headed Gull nest in a variety of habitats such as freshwater lakes and marshes, salt marshes, settling ponds, clay pits, coastal dunes, and offshore islands (Burger et al., 2020). Greers Isle is a small island in the enclosed and highly sheltered marine waters of Mulroy Bay, Co. Donega
Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability	Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	The diet of Black-headed Gull varies according to location, but often includes large quantities of aquatic and terrestrial insects and earthworms (Burger et al., 2020). Black-headed Gull nesting at coastal colonies may feed heavily on marine invertebrates, but the reported diet is extremely broad and opportunistic (Burger et al., 2020). Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates of Black-headed Gull foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season and estimate a mean foraging range of 7km and a maximum foraging range of 19km for this species (see Power et al., 2021)

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 7 of 12

Disturbance at the breeding site	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on birds at the breeding site	Disturbance events at the nest site/breeding colony level can result in a reduction of overall productivity and even lead to the abandonment of the breeding colony. The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population size and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure, which can result in increased likelihood of mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population size and spatial distribution
Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Seabird species can make extensive use of the marine waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific maintenance behaviours (e.g. courtship, bathing, preening) as defined in McSorley et al. (2003). Additionally, some species may engage in maintenance behaviours outside of the breeding colony but not in the water
Barriers to connectivity	Number, location, shape, and area (ha)	Barriers do not significantly impact the population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Seabirds, particularly during the breeding season, require regular and efficient access to marine waters ecologically connected to the colony in order to forage as well as to engage in other maintenance behaviours. Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates of Black-headed Gull foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season and estimated a mean foraging range of 7km and a maximum foraging range of 19km for this species (see Power et al., 2021)

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 8 of 12

Conservation Objectives for : Greers Isle SPA [004082]

A182 Common Gull *Larus canus*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Common Gull in Greers Isle SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Breeding population size	Number of Apparently Occupied Nests (AON)	Long term SPA population trend is stable or increasing	Approximately 30 pairs of Common Gull bred at this SPA in 2002 (Mitchell et al., 2004). In 2002, it was noted that vegetation growth had made large parts of the island unsuitable for breeding birds (Perry and Speer, 2002). Less than 20 breeding pairs were present in the SPA in 2004 (Perry and Speer, 2004). The site has not been surveyed in recent years. American Mink <i>Neogale vison</i> has been recorded at this site and may have had an impact on the breeding success of Common Gull at this SPA
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per breeding pair	Sufficient to maintain a stable or increasing population	There was no productivity data available for this species in this SPA. A lack of comprehensive Irish data precludes the identification of a minimum productivity rate for this species at the site and at the national level. Common Gull productivity in Scotland between 2000 and 2020 was below 0.6 chicks per breeding pair; in this time period the Scottish population of Common Gull was decreasing (Harris et al., 2024). It is likely that the presence of mink at this site had a significant impact on the productivity of this species
Distribution: extent of available nesting options within the SPA	Numbers and spatial distribution	Sufficient availability of suitable nesting sites throughout the SPA to maintain a stable or increasing population	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable nesting habitat for the breeding population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas may vary through time. This will affect the spatiotemporal patterns of use of the habitats by Common Gull. Common Gull breeding near marine environments typically nest on small inshore rocky stacks, islets and islands, grassy and rocky slopes, sand dunes, and the foreshore (Moskoff et al., 2021). Greers Isle is a small island in the enclosed and highly sheltered marine waters of Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal
Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability	Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Diet varies by location and season. Birds foraging in marine environments feed on fish and marine invertebrates (Moskoff et al., 2021). Common Gull feeding in terrestrial environments typically feed on earthworms and insects such as fly larvae (Moskoff et al., 2021). Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) estimates that the maximum foraging range of a Common Gull from the nest site during the breeding season is 50km (see Power et al., 2021)
Disturbance at the breeding site	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on birds at the breeding site	Disturbance events at the nest site/breeding colony level can result in a reduction of overall productivity and even lead to the abandonment of the breeding colony. The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population size and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure, which can result in increased likelihood of mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population size and spatial distribution

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 9 of 12

Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Seabird species can make extensive use of the marine waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific maintenance behaviours (e.g. courtship, bathing, preening) as defined in McSorley et al. (2003). Additionally, some species may engage in maintenance behaviours outside of the breeding colony but not in the water
Barriers to connectivity	Number, location, shape, and area (ha)	Barriers do not significantly impact the population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	require regular and efficient access to marine waters ecologically connected to the colony in order to

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 10 of 12

Conservation Objectives for : Greers Isle SPA [004082]

A191 Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

To restore the Favourable conservation condition of Sandwich Tern in Greers Isle SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Breeding population size	Number of Apparently Occupied Nests (AON)	Long term SPA population trend is stable or increasing	Sandwich Tern have bred at this SPA since at least 1984 when the population was 180 pairs (Whilde, 1985). The colony persisted until 1995, with a peak of 240 pairs in 1989. In 1995 the colony was deserted as a result of depredation by American Mink <i>Neogale vison</i> (Hannon et al., 1997; Perry and Speer, 2001). After a seven year absence, 63 pairs were recorded in 2002, 175 pairs in 2003 and 217 pairs in 2004 (Perry and Speer, 2002, 2003 and 2004). Breeding was last recorded in 2008, which indicates a complete population collapse (NPWS internal files), likely due to mink and vegetation growth. Some populations can show strong site fidelity, but generally this species exhibits a lack of fidelity to particular colony sites in most areas (Shealer et al., 2020). Therefore, if the breeding habitat is suitable, it is possible that this species wil return. The national population has increased by 39% between 1998 - 2002 and 2015 - 2021 (Burne et al., 2023)
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per breeding pair	Sufficient to maintain a stable or increasing population	Productivity at this SPA was monitored annually most seasons before the colony was deserted (Perry and Speer, 2004). The average productivity between 1986 and 1994 was 1.1 fledged young per pair. In that time period, the productivity was relatively stable with 0.73 being the lowest recorded. In 2002 and 2003 the productivity dropped to 0.36 and 0.12 respectively, the lowest recorded at the site. In 200 it increased to 0.86. Cook and Robinson (2010) undertook Population Viability Analyses (PVA) of a selection of breeding populations in the UK. Over their study period, Sandwich Tern productivity at monitored nests was 0.66. Were this level to be maintained, Sandwich Tern populations would decline by 62% over 25 years. For the population to stabilise, breeding success would have to increase to 1.1 chicks per nest per year. This suggests that the productivity rate at this SPA was sufficient to maintain the population between 1986 and 1994 but may have been too low between 2002 and 2004
Distribution: extent of available nesting options within the SPA	Numbers and spatial distribution	Sufficient availability of suitable nesting sites throughout the SPA to maintain a stable or increasing population	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable nesting habitat for the breeding population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat across the SPA may vary through time. This will affect the spatio-temporal patterns of use of the habitats by Sandwich Tern. Typically, colonies are located in areas with bare sand, small pebbles, or short grass (Shealer et al., 2020). In Ireland, all known large colonies are situated on marine or inland islands of varying distances from the mainland/shore. Greers Isle SPA is a very small island in the enclosed and highly sheltered marine waters of Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal. In 2002, it was noted that vegetation growth had made parts of the island unsuitable for breeding Sandwich Tern (Perry and Speer, 2002)

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 11 of 12

Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability	Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Sandwich Tern feed primarily along coastal marine areas. They are largely piscivorous. In north-temperate regions of Europe they primarily eat Clupeidae (herrings) and Ammodytidae (sandeels) families (Shealer et al., 2020). Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) of Sandwich Tern foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season, which are 9km, 34km, and 80km respectively (see Power et al., 2021)
Disturbance at the breeding site	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on birds at the breeding site	Disturbance events at the nest site/breeding colony level can result in a reduction of overall productivity and even lead to the abandonment of the breeding colony. The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population size and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure, which can result in increased likelihood of mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population size and spatial distribution
Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony	Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Seabird species can make extensive use of the waters adjacent to their breeding colonies for non site-specific maintenance behaviours (e.g. courtship, bathing, preening) as defined in McSorley et al. (2003). Additionally, some species may engage in maintenance behaviours outside of the breeding colony but not in the water. For example, terns may roost on rocky islets or beaches away from the breeding colony
Barriers to connectivity	Number, location, shape, and area (ha)	Barriers do not significantly impact the population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	require regular access to waters ecologically connected to the colony in order to forage as well as

07 Mar 2025 Version 1 Page 12 of 12



