

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Seven Heads SPA 004191



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife
Service

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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.

Qualifying Interests

** indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive*

004191 Seven Heads SPA

A346 Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Please note that this SPA is adjacent to Courtmacsherry Bay SPA (004219). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the adjacent site as appropriate.

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

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

NPWS Documents

Year :	2010
Title :	The seasonal distribution and foraging behaviour of Red-billed Choughs <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> in Counties Waterford and Cork, February 2008 to January 2009
Author :	Trewby, M.; Carroll, D.; Mughan, N.; O'Keeffe, D.; Newton, S.
Series :	Unpublished BirdWatch Ireland Report to National Parks & Wildlife Service
Year :	2024
Title :	Status and distribution of Chough in Ireland: results of the 2021 survey
Author :	Colhoun, K.; Rooney, E.; Collins, J.; Keogh, N.P.; Lauder, A.; Heardman, C.; Cummins, S.
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 151

Other References

Year :	1965
Title :	The status of the Chough in Ireland
Author :	Cabot, D.
Series :	Irish Naturalists' Journal 15: 95-100
Year :	1983
Title :	The chough in Britain and Ireland
Author :	Bullock, I., Drewett, D.; Mickleburg, S.
Series :	British Birds, 76: 377-401
Year :	1993
Title :	The second international chough survey in Ireland, 1992
Author :	Berrow, S.D.; Mackie, K.L.; O'Sullivan, O.; Shepherd, K.B.; Mellon, C.; Coveney, J.A.
Series :	Irish Birds, 5: 1-10
Year :	1993
Title :	Seasonal variations in numbers and levels of activity in a communal roost of Choughs <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> in central Spain
Author :	Blanco, G.; Fargallo, J.A.; Cuevas, J.A.
Series :	Avocetta, 17: 41-44
Year :	2003
Title :	The status and distribution of choughs <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> in the Republic of Ireland 2002/03
Author :	Gray, N., Thomas, G., Trewby, M.; Newton, S.F.
Series :	Irish Birds, 7, 147-156
Year :	2005
Title :	Choughs <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> breeding in Wales select foraging habitat at different spatial scales
Author :	Whitehead, S.; Johnstone, I.; Wilson, J.
Series :	Bird Study, 52:2, 193-203
Year :	2006
Title :	The breeding season foraging behaviour of choughs <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> in three Irish chough important bird areas
Author :	Trewby, M., Gray, N., Cummins, S., Thomas, G. & Newton, S.
Series :	Unpublished BirdWatch Ireland Report, Kilcoole, Wicklow

- Year :** 2006
- Title :** Linking territory quality and reproductive success in the chough (*Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*): implications for conservation management of an endangered population
- Author :** Kerbiriou, C.; Gourmelon, F.; Jiguet, F.; Le Viol, I.; Frédéric Bioret, F.; Julliard, R.
- Series :** Ibis, 148 (2), pp.352-364
-
- Year :** 2011
- Title :** Aspects of the feeding ecology and breeding biology of the red-billed chough (*Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*) in Ireland
- Author :** Boylan, M.
- Series :** PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland, Cork.
-
- Year :** 2018
- Title :** Breeding status of red-billed choughs *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax* in the UK and Isle of Man in 2014
- Author :** Hayhow, D.B.; Johnstone, I.; Moore, A.S.; Mucklow, C.; Stratford, A.; Šúr, M.; Eaton, M.A.
- Series :** Bird Study, 65(4), 458-470
-
- Year :** 2019
- Title :** Adverse effects of routine bovine health treatments containing triclabendazole and synthetic pyrethroids on the abundance of dipteran larvae in bovine faeces
- Author :** Gilbert, G.; MacGillivray, F.S.; Robertson, H.L.; Jonsson, N.N.
- Series :** Nature Scientific Reports 9, 4315
-
- Year :** 2022
- Title :** Chough *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax* counts at a Waterford coastal roost
- Author :** McGrath, D.
- Series :** Irish Birds 44: 103-107
-

A346 Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*


To maintain the Favourable conservation condition of Chough in Seven Heads SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Population size	Number of breeding pairs	No significant decline	A review of 1992 and 2002/03 national survey data, including count units and survey methods applied, was undertaken (NPWS internal files). The range of population estimates for the SPA are set out using 'confirmed and probable' breeding pairs only and 'all breeding pair' categories for each national survey since 1992, with 13 in 1992; 7 - 15 in 2002/03 and 9 - 13 in 2021. Applying stricter 2021 survey criteria (Hayhow et al., 2018; Colhoun et al., 2024) retrospectively to 1992 and 2002/03 records, which exclude records with no breeding evidence (NBE) as per Colhoun et al. (2024), updates these original estimates to 10 - 13 (1992), 7 - 12 pairs (2002/03), and 9 - 13 pairs (2021). Of note, Trewby et al. (2010) estimated 11 - 14 pairs for the SPA in 2008/09 with more intensive survey effort through the annual cycle
Population trend	Percentage change	Population trend stable or increasing	The breeding component of the population, as opposed to non-breeding flock birds, is considered a more reliable metric to reflect population change (Trewby et al., 2006). Using available data from the 1992 (Berrow et al., 1993), 2002/03 (Gray et al., 2003) and 2021 (Colhoun et al., 2024) national surveys, the population trend for the site is considered stable in the short term (i.e. 2002/03 - 2021) and stable in the longer term (1992 - 2021) based on assessments of change in the numbers of known 'confirmed' and 'probable' pair records only; and including all 'possible' breeding pair records for the site, applying 2021 criteria (Colhoun et al., 2024). For the county, the population is at least stable, with pair totals of 73 - 98 in 1963 (Cabot, 1965); 148 - 153 in 1983 (Bullock et al., 1983); 282 in 1992 (Berrow et al., 1993); 257 in 2002/03 (Gray et al., 2003); and 228 (excluding NBEs) in 2021 (Colhoun et al., 2024)
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per confirmed pair	Sufficient to maintain population size target	Most of the population nest along coastal cliffs or in sea caves. In most instances, due to the inaccessible nature of nesting locations, estimates of breeding productivity and success are based on numbers of fledged young seen with adults post-fledging, unless records are for man-made/artificial sites e.g. cattle sheds, old buildings and castles etc. Some studies have provided estimates of productivity and/or success, (e.g. Berrow et al., 1993; Gray et al., 2003; Boylan, 2011; Trewby et al., 2006), and for this SPA, combined with Galley Head to Duneen Point SPA (Co. Cork), a figure of 1.62 fledglings per successful pair was estimated by Trewby et al. (2010), using data from 13 breeding pairs. However, this estimate is based on one year's data, and may not be sufficiently representative for the SPA, and wider. Overall, there is a lack of robust representative Irish data to determine a more quantitative target for breeding productivity

Foraging habitat: quality and quantity	Hectares (ha)	Maintain sufficient quality and quantity of coastal grassland and other relevant habitats to support the population of Chough at the level of breeding pairs referred to in the attribute above	Studies in Ireland (e.g. Trewby et al., 2006), Wales (e.g. Whitehead et al., 2005) and elsewhere (e.g. Kerbiriou et al., 2006) have shown that breeding Chough spend most of their time foraging near nest sites (April - June inclusive). Coastal pairs tend to commute along the coast from breeding sites, rather than inland (Trewby et al., 2006). Proximity of suitably-sized feeding areas to nest sites is likely to positively support breeding success (Kerbiriou et al., 2006). Monthly transects for SPAs in Co. Cork had 60% of ground observations within 300m of mean high water (Trewby et al., 2010). Grazed habitats with short swards of <5cm are typically preferred, and areas of bare ground, where soils are easier to probe e.g. paths, along with earth banks and stone banks. Maritime vegetation on cliffs, especially in spring, is also favoured. Thus, sufficient foraging habitat within 350m of the coastline, where Chough are known to breed, is essential to support breeding pairs
Food availability: prey biomass	Quantity per unit area	Maintain adequate levels of prey biomass (including preferred invertebrate prey items such as leatherjackets, dung beetles, etc.)	Chough feed largely on invertebrates (e.g. ants, spiders, worms, insect larvae such as crane fly larvae, leatherjackets and dung beetles), at or near the soil surface where prey items are more accessible. In warmer weather, Chough can be seen picking off surface active insects, e.g. spiders, including from heather plants (Trewby et al., 2010). The dosing of livestock with veterinary parasiticide treatments (including anthelmintics) has knock-on consequences with respect to invertebrate density in grasslands on which Chough depend (Gilbert et al., 2019)
Distribution of roosting sites	Spatial distribution	The distribution of preferred roosts is maintained	Post-breeding, Chough are highly social, forming mobile flocks that travel several kilometres to forage (McGrath, 2022). In July, family groups create 'nursery' flocks, returning to nest sites for roosting. By late summer, these groups, along with non-breeding sub-adults, begin to converge pre-dusk at communal roost sites, leaving post-dawn (Trewby et al., 2010; Blanco et al., 1993). Roosts are usually near good foraging habitats like grazed dune systems, and peak attendance occurs in late summer or early autumn, after the breeding season. The largest known communal roost, and of note nationally, near this SPA is at the Old Head of Kinsale, where 73 birds were observed in July 2008 (Trewby et al., 2010), with over 100 recorded in other years. Within the SPA, only small, temporary roosts have been documented. Trewby et al. (2010) noted 14 birds from the Seven Heads flock roosting communally at Foilvrsta, which was an unusual case. By April 2008, only one pair remained roosting there
Disturbance	Intensity, timing, frequency and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact upon Chough in the SPA	Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing, duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source and location (e.g. if access to preferred food sources is restricted), must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population size, population trend, productivity rate and distribution of roosting sites. Further, site fidelity (e.g. pairs to nest sites while breeding, or flocks to roost sites at other times), weather (e.g. prolonged cold spells) and predation/competition should also be factored in. Coastal breeding pairs spend up to 80% of their time within 350m of the nest site (Trewby et al., 2006). In Co. Cork, 60% of all foraging observations were within 300m of mean high water (Trewby et al., 2010). Impacts are likely to be highest near nest sites (e.g. on coastal cliffs where available foraging habitats are more limited in total area) and at roost sites



Legend

 Seven Heads SPA 004191




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**MAP 1:
SEVEN HEADS SPA
CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
SPA DESIGNATION**

Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document

**SITE CODE:
SPA 004191; version 3
CO. CORK**

0 0.5 1 2 Kilometres

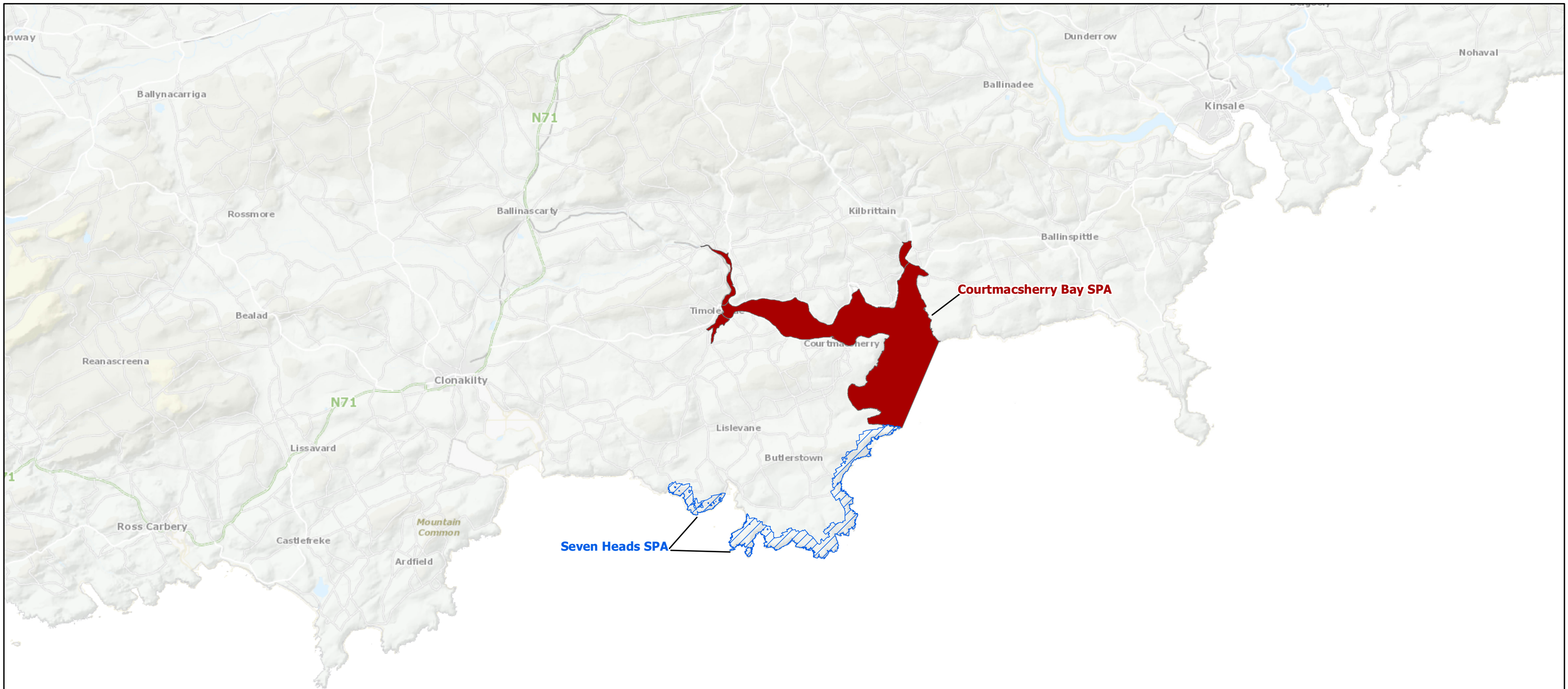


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**Map version 1
Date: March 2024**



Legend

-  Seven Heads SPA 004191
-  Courtmacsherry Bay SPA 004219




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**MAP 2:
 SEVEN HEADS SPA
 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES
 OVERLAPPING AND ADJACENT SITES**

Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document

**SITE CODE:
 SPA 004191; version 3
 CO. CORK**

0 1.25 2.5 5 Kilometres



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**Map version 1
 Date: March 2024**