

## The Proportion of Scotland's Protected Sites in Favourable Condition 2012

### An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

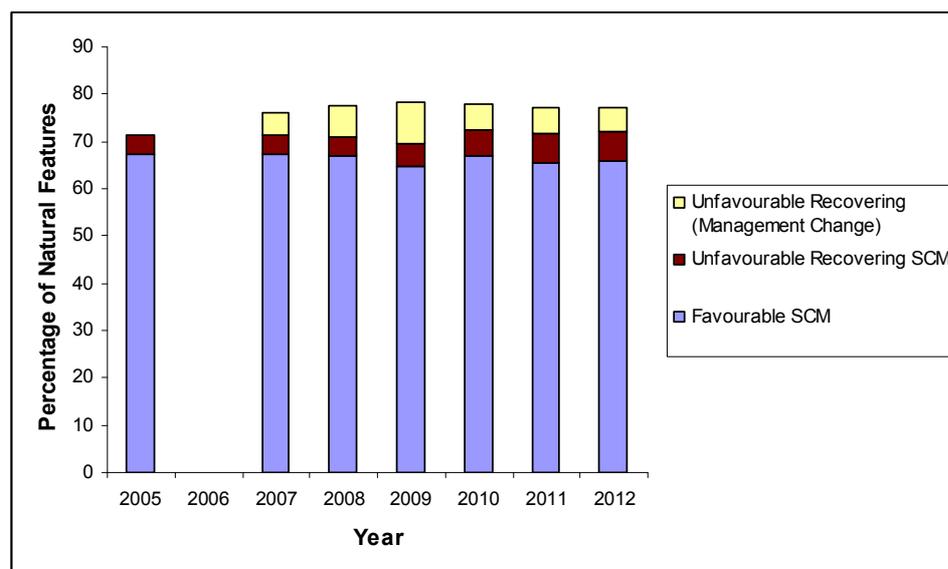
Scotland has a rich and important diversity of biological and geological natural features. Many of these species populations, habitats or earth science features are nationally and/or internationally important and there is a series of nature conservation designations at national (Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)), European (Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA)) and international (Ramsar) levels which seek to protect the best examples. There are a total of 1,883 protected sites in Scotland, although their boundaries sometimes overlap, which host a total of 5,373 designated natural features.

#### Evidence

The condition of features on designated sites in Scotland is determined by Scottish Natural Heritage's (SNH) Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) programme. SCM is a 6 year rolling programme of monitoring which aims to assess the condition of a sample of designated natural features each year. SCM acts as a trigger mechanism for follow-up work when an unfavourable assessment is concluded.

Figure 1 indicates how the proportion of features in favourable condition has changed since the baseline was established in 2005. The current protocols for tracking the progress being made to put in place remedial management measures for unfavourable natural features were started in 2007. The figures presented are the latest assessment for all those features which have been assessed by the 31<sup>st</sup> March of the relevant year.

**Figure 1: The Proportion of Features in Favourable Condition<sup>1</sup> at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**



#### Assessment

- The proportion of natural features in favourable condition<sup>1</sup> on protected sites at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 was 77.2%. This figure comprises:
  - SCM Condition Assessment - Favourable 65.7%
  - SCM Condition Assessment - Unfavourable Recovering 6.3%
  - Unfavourable Recovering Due to Management Change 5.2%
- The proportion of features in favourable condition has increased by 5.8% between 2005 and 2012.
- There has been no meaningful change in the proportion of features in favourable condition between 2011 and 2012.

<b>Change (2011 – 12)</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>Long term trend (2005-12)</b>	<b>Increase</b>

<sup>1</sup> For definitions of condition categories see 'Source data and updates' section

## Commentary

As SCM is a rolling programme of monitoring, the proportion of features in favourable condition changes frequently. This will depend on new condition assessments being completed and unfavourable features having benefited from remedial management so that they are considered to be recovering due to management change. The figures presented here are, therefore, a snapshot of the position at 31<sup>st</sup> March in the given year. By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, out of the 5,373 features hosted on designated sites, the condition of 5,149 had been assessed and form the Official Statistic. As new SCM assessments are completed (either first or repeat assessments), they are used to update the proportion of features in favourable condition.

There is considerable variation in the proportion of features in favourable condition across the different natural feature types, as can be seen in Table 1. A detailed breakdown of the proportion of individual feature types in favourable condition can be seen in Annex 1.

**Table 1: Proportion of Natural Features in Favourable Condition by Feature Type at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

Feature Category	Number of Features	Proportion Favourable
Earth sciences	636	96.9%
Habitats	2396	73.5%
Species	2117	75.3%
All Feature Types	5149	77.2%

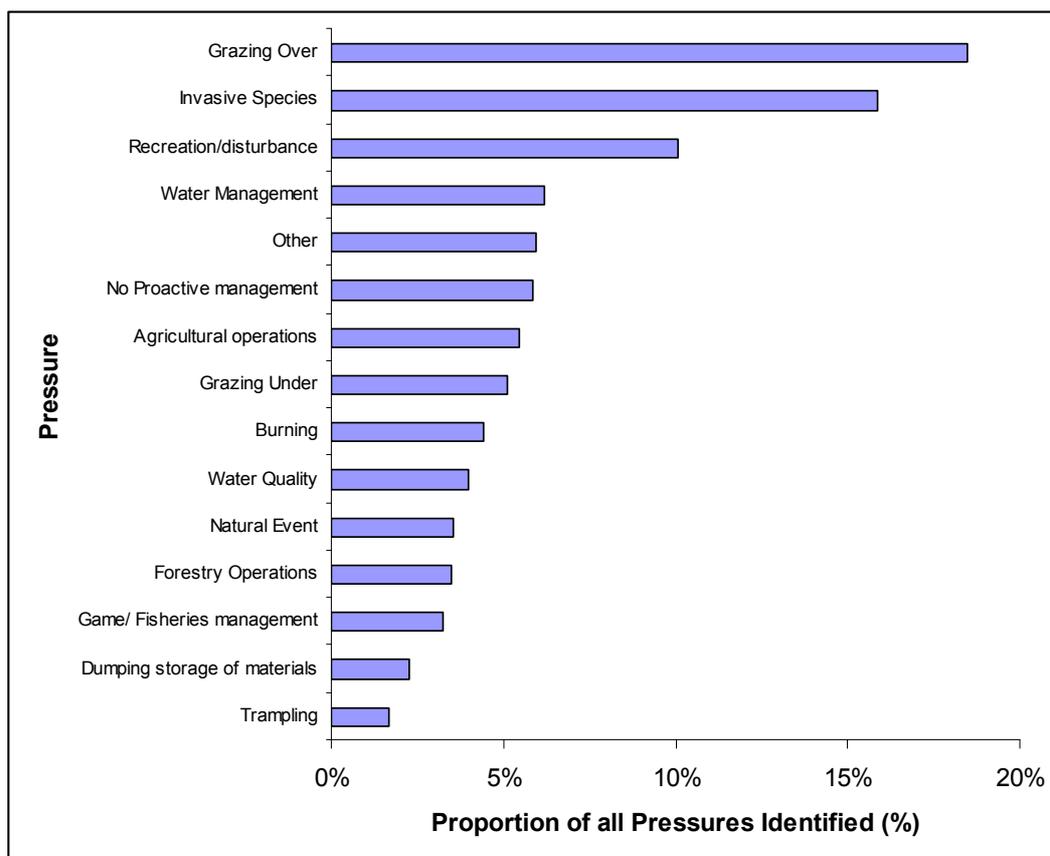
The reason the proportion of natural features in favourable condition has not increased during 2011/12, despite 46 features having benefited from remedial management to improve their condition during the year, is largely due to the proportion of new SCM assessments during the same period being 73% favourable/recovering and 27% unfavourable. Therefore, the gains in condition by management action have been cancelled out because the proportion of favourable new assessments completed during 2011/12 is lower than the overall average. Had the remedial actions not been taken, we could have anticipated a 1% reduction in the proportion of features in favourable/recovering condition.

Amongst the unfavourable natural features which have not yet fully benefited from remedial management, there are a group where there are no pressures on the protected site itself, or nearby, and yet the feature remains unfavourable. There are, therefore, factors outwith local management control which are influencing condition. The majority of the 326 natural features which fall into this category are sea bird populations, where the reasons for declining populations are thought to be due to changes in prey distribution brought about by climate change and/or fisheries policy, rather than issues on the protected area itself. As there is no immediate action which can be taken to relieve these wider pressures and conditions on the protected area appropriate to support the feature, they are considered favourable for the purposes of Biodiverstiy reporting (to align with United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan reporting). Working on this basis, the overall proportion of natural features in favourable condition rises to 83.5%.

The most common negative influences (known as Pressures) on natural features on protected sites which result in unfavourable condition can be seen in Figure 2. Individual natural features on a site may be adversely affected by one or more pressure.

Figure 2 clearly shows that a significant proportion of unfavourable natural features are related to grazing; whether this is overgrazing by wild herbivores such as deer, feral goats or rabbits, or farm stock or a combination of wild and domesticated grazers. Insufficient grazing to maintain the balance of species in the habitat has also been frequently identified. Delivering remedial management on protected areas where grazing is an issue can often be complex, particularly concerning the management of wild deer herds which regularly move across ownerships depending on the season, weather conditions and forage availability. The next most common pressure on unfavourable natural features is the presence, or expanding area, of invasive species; both native (e.g. bracken) and non-native (naturalised) (e.g. Rhododendron) species. Whether native or non-native, invasive species can have a detrimental effect on important habitats and the flora and fauna they support by competing for nutrients and light and ultimately changing the ecology of the habitat.

**Figure 2: Summary of the main pressures on natural features on protected sites**  
*Data correct as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012*



### Source data and updates

To measure progress towards the Scottish Government target of improving the proportion of natural features in favourable condition the following are taken into account:

- the results of SCM,
- actions which have been taken to put in place remedial management to improve the condition of the feature.

Where remedial management can be put in place on, or near the site, SNH staff and partner organisations engage with land managers and statutory bodies to identify and implement the appropriate measures to promote recovery. Such measures to date have included Rural Stewardship Schemes, Scottish Forestry Grant Schemes, Natural Care Schemes, individual management agreements negotiated by SNH and latterly Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding. Voluntary Control Agreements under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 have also been widely used to facilitate recovery of unfavourable features in upland areas.

For the purposes of the Condition Target, 'favourable condition' includes natural features which are in favourable condition, or are recovering, with the necessary management measures in place, so that in SNH's expert judgment the natural feature will in due course reach favourable condition. This means that as an interim measure, natural features where remedial management has been put in place to address all the known causes of unfavourable condition are counted as favourable until such time as a subsequent SCM assessment verifies the condition, or identifies further work which may be required to further improve condition. Such natural features are categorised as 'unfavourable recovering due to management change'.

The 2005 SCM results set the baseline against which progress towards the Condition Target is measured.

The framework for making a SCM assessment is the [Common Standards Monitoring Guidance](#), published by Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This Guidance provides a common approach to the monitoring of natural features across the whole of the United Kingdom.

The SCM condition assessments are stored on a corporate database by SNH and are combined with data on remedial management through the Remedies database to produce the overall Condition Target results. Condition data for individual sites/features can be accessed at [SNHi](#).

The proportion of protected sites in favourable condition will next be updated in May 2013.

Official Statistics are produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## **References**

JNCC, (2003), Guidance for Common Standards Monitoring

**Annex 1: The Proportion of Natural Features in Favourable Condition by Broad Type at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

<b>Natural Feature Type</b>	<b>Number of Features</b>	<b>Proportion Favourable (%)</b>
<b>Habitats</b>		
Coastal	330	85.8%
Freshwater	223	77.6%
Grasslands	219	61.6%
Heath	378	63.0%
Marine	100	98.0%
Upland	316	78.5%
Wetland	340	75.9%
Woodlands	490	67.1%
<b>Habitats Total</b>	<b>2396</b>	<b>73.5%</b>
<b>Species</b>		
Amphibians	12	50.0%
Birds	1485	73.1%
Butterflies	28	96.4%
Dragonflies	25	100%
Fish	46	80.4%
Invertebrates	166	83.7%
Marine Mammals	28	64.3%
Non-vascular Plants	135	75.6%
Terrestrial Mammals	50	94.0%
Vascular Plants	142	76.1%
<b>Species Total</b>	<b>2117</b>	<b>75.3%</b>
<b>Earth Science</b>		
Earth Science	636	96.9%
<b>Earth Science Total</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>96.9%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5149</b>	<b>77.2%</b>