



Scotland's  
National Nature  
Reserves  
Magical places, amazing wildlife.



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

## The Management Plan for Noss National Nature Reserve 2014-2024



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### Foreword

Noss National Nature Reserve, Shetland, is home to one of the UK's largest seabird colonies. A dramatic island with soaring cliffs, Noss regularly hosts 15 species of breeding seabirds. In spring and summer gannets, auks, fulmars and kittiwakes crowd onto the terraced sandstone cliffs. Great skuas nest further inland on the sheep-grazed interior visiting the coast in search of food. Seals, otters and cetaceans feed in the waters offshore.

Two reserve wardens live on the island in summer and provide the inflatable boat ferry for visitors to Noss. Their home, Gungstie, doubles as the visitor and information centre. Historically grazed by sheep and the 19th Century base of the first Shetland Pony Stud, Noss is still a working sheep farm today. Bronze Age remains indicate that Noss has been inhabited for 4,000 years.

Visitors can enjoy views along the length of Shetland from the Noup of Noss, whilst taking in the spectacle of tens of thousands of seabirds wheeling above and below on updraughts rich with the distinctive sounds and smells of seabirds.

Noss is one of a suite of NNRs in Scotland. Scotland's NNRs are special places for nature, where some of the best examples of Scotland's wildlife are managed. Every NNR is carefully managed both for nature and for people, giving visitors the opportunity to experience our rich natural heritage.

'The Story of Noss National Nature Reserve' is a companion publication which has more information about Noss NNR and its history. The Story provides the foundation for managing the site and is recommended reading for those wishing to understand more about the management of this very special place.

In 2013, we carried out a review of our last Plan for Noss NNR 2007-2013. This, together with management plan workshops and specialist advice, was used to develop our future management proposals and inform the preparation of a draft Management Plan for 2014-2024 which we then opened for public consultation. Your feedback was collated in a Consultation Report which is available from the SNH Lerwick Office and was used to inform the completion of this Management Plan.

The first section of this Plan gives our vision for Noss, describing how we would like to see the Reserve in 2038. It specifies our objectives for management and outlines projects planned to deliver these objectives.

During the final year of the plan, we will review our progress against these objectives to determine the future direction of our management on the reserve.

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## Maps of Noss



## Our Vision for Noss NNR

Noss National Nature Reserve is special; the aim is to keep it that way. The Management Plan 2014-2024 sets out our vision for the Reserve describing how we would like the Reserve to be in 2038. The management we plan to carry out over the next 10 years has been designed with this vision in mind.

### Our Vision for Noss NNR in 2038

Noss is renowned as a classic seabird island and it retains a natural and wild feel.

Noss is a high quality visitor experience - there are more visitors to Noss and the island is an exemplar of sustainable tourism.

Noss is high profile - more people are aware of the island and its wildlife.

Noss meets the needs of wildlife, visitors and the other land managers.

## Protected Areas and features

Noss became a National Nature Reserve in 1955, through an agreement between the landowners, the Garth Estate (now the Gardie Trust), and the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) (one of SNH's predecessors). The agreement covers 313 hectares (ha) and includes use of the original farmhouse, Gungstie, for the visitor centre and warden's accommodation. The reserve has traditionally been grazed and this is still the case today; SNH, the Gardie Trust and the graziers work together to manage the reserve. Two SNH wardens live on the island from April to September to provide visitor transport/services, monitor the wildlife and carry out management tasks.

The natural heritage interests at Noss are of UK and European importance. The Reserve is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for supporting nationally important breeding seabird colony and populations of breeding Arctic skua, great skua, guillemot and kittiwake. The nationally important bird populations on the Reserve also form part of the larger Noss Special Protection Area (SPA). The Noss SPA is of European importance for its breeding seabird assemblage as well as breeding fulmar, great skua, guillemot, kittiwake and puffin populations.

Table 1: Protected features and Protected Areas overlapping Noss NNR

Feature	Protected Area
Arctic skua, breeding	Noss SSSI
Fulmar, breeding	Noss SPA

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Protected Area</b>
Gannet, breeding	Noss SPA Noss SSSI
Great skua, breeding	Noss SPA Noss SSSI
Guillemot, breeding	Noss SPA Noss SSSI
Kittiwake, breeding	Noss SPA Noss SSSI
Puffin, breeding	Noss SPA
Seabird assemblage, breeding	Noss SPA
Seabird colony, breeding	Noss SSSI

Whilst managing Noss NNR we have to take account of our legal obligations and Government policy to manage the features that are listed as important in a European or international context. This management plan has been appraised accordingly, and where a project listed in the plan is likely to have a significant effect on one or more of the qualifying features of the SPA, we will carry out an 'appropriate assessment'. This includes all projects, whether they are direct habitat management or providing a new visitor facility on the Reserve. We will only proceed if they do not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA. Likewise, we will also take account of obligations to manage features that are valued as important in a British context, as well as features that are locally important.



## 1 Natural Heritage Management

**Objective NH1:** Ensure the reserve continues to provide appropriate nesting habitat for the range and populations of breeding seabirds; continuing our commitment to their long-term monitoring and using this to inform our understanding of the impacts of climate change and marine development/activities on seabirds.

Although many of the pressures on seabird species, for example low food availability, cannot be removed by protection or management at breeding sites some can and these are what the projects below aim to mitigate.

In order to further protect these species, many of which are declining fast, we need a greater understanding of what is happening to them and why. Data generated by the detailed monitoring carried out on Noss will contribute to this and is submitted to various local and national databases.

### Projects planned to achieve and inform Objective NH1:

NH1.1	Graze sheep at 1 per ha. to maintain suitable sward for nesting great skua and Arctic skua.
NH1.2	Provide instruction to visitors to prevent accidental disturbance of nest sites on moorland and at cliff ledges. Manage visitor access to sensitive areas.
NH1.3	Continue annual programme of long-term seabird productivity monitoring, population surveys and 6 year programme of 'all island' counts, providing results to JNCC seabird monitoring programme, Shetland Bird Club (for annual reports). Annual counts contribute to Site Condition Monitoring (SCM).
NH1.4	Use long-term monitoring data to contribute to studies which increase our understanding of the impacts of climate change and marine developments and activities on seabird populations. Disseminate on Scotland's Environmental web.
NH1.5	Undertake SCM for fulmar, gannet, great skua, guillemot, kittiwake, puffin, Arctic skua and the seabird colony/assemblage in 2014/15 onwards.
NH1.6	Provide opportunities and logistic support for research projects especially where these relate to climate change and foraging ranges/behaviour of seabirds at sea.

## 2 Management for People

**Objective VM1:** Provide a high quality visitor experience. Exceed target of 1500 visitors per year ensuring that >85% of visitors asked rate their experience as good or above.

Unless visitors have access to a suitable private boat the SNH-run zodiac ferry is the only way to reach the reserve. Providing a regular, safe ferry service is our first priority for visitor management. All visitors to Noss are greeted by a warden. In addition to their knowledge of Noss and its natural heritage the wardens can tell visitors about what it is like to live in such a special place.

We hope to increase the number of participants in guided walks lead by the wardens. We will investigate ways to do this, including encouraging organised groups to visit Noss.

We aim to increase the use of internet resources to reach remote audiences. The first stage of this is to provide internet on the reserve so that the wardens can regularly update blogs etc.

### Projects planned to achieve and inform Objective VM1:

VM1.1	Provide Noss Ferry between end April and end August and maintain Ferry Information line - adding additional information to Lerwick-Bressay Ferry terminal and local outlets (e.g. heritage centre, tourist facilities).
VM1.2	Seasonal staff to provide a welcome brief to all visitors. Include Natural heritage background, the work of SNH and Health and Safety information.
VM1.3	Promote Noss NNR through Tourist Information Centre, local press, radio and accommodation providers.
VM1.4	Organise and run an annual Noss NNR Open Day.
VM1.5	Complete a Visitor Centre Exhibit plan in 2018 focusing on the island's seabirds and raising awareness of impacts of climate change globally on seabird populations.
VM1.6	Implement Visitor Centre Exhibit Plan by 2019.
VM1.7	Review and update information about the Reserve on the Scotland's NNRs website every 6 months. Provide links to downloadable material on the seabirds and the impacts of climate change as this becomes available.
VM1.8	Seasonal staff to use social media to provide regular up to date information about Noss NNR to a wider audience.
VM1.9	Distribute reserve leaflet to local outlets. Review and update NNR leaflet in 2017.
VM1.10	Collate visitor numbers and update quarterly reporting during visitor season.

VM1.11	Carry out Visitor survey to provide qualitative information on visitor experiences.
VM1.12	Organise and run a bird monitoring training day every third year.
VM1.13	Provide a programme of guided walks during the open season - at least 2 per month May to August with additional guided walks on request.

**Objective VM2:** Engaging with the community: To engage with local community on Bressay and support volunteering.

Following the closure of the Bressay school we hope to forge stronger links with other local schools and facilitate visits to Noss where possible. We will continue to use local contractors for work on Noss and our wardens regularly work with the Noss graziers.

We plan to provide further volunteering opportunities, particularly for those hoping to gain work experience in a related field and our annual Noss Open Day provides an excellent opportunity to encourage visitors (particularly local families) and involve local volunteers.

**Projects planned to achieve and inform Objective VM2:**

VM2.1	Contact local schools and support at least 1 school visit each per year.
VM2.2	Engage at least 1 local volunteer annually for regular tasks on the Reserve.
VM2.3	Develop list of volunteer tasks and provide volunteer opportunities for at least 1 work party every alternate year.
VM2.4	Engage with and utilise local contractors.

### 3 Property Management (PM)

**Objective PM1:** To manage the reserve property responsibly following best practice.

#### Projects planned to achieve and inform Objective PM1:

PM1.1	Carry out quarterly safety and condition assessments of all visitor infrastructure and keep accurate records during visitor season.
PM1.2	Ensure the management of the property complies with Health & Safety Regulations including risk assessment and annual fire plan reviews.
PM1.3	Maintain leased building in accordance with listed building planning.
PM1.4	Prevent erosion around the scheduled ancient monument and access close to Gungstie in conjunction with estate. Main technique is laying netting to reduce rabbit damage.
PM1.5	Maintain reserve equipment and infrastructure.
PM1.6	Carry out annual beach clearance at end April ahead of main visitor period.
PM1.7	Improve Noss Shore landing point - install guide posts by 2016 that can be used as support when rocks are slippery. Even out path by further use of concreted stone steps.
PM1.8	Ensure retention of Green Tourism Board Scheme award.
PM1.9	Renew Gungstie Building lease.
PM1.10	Maintain terms of the Nature Reserve Agreement.

## **4 Summary**

Noss is an impressive island reserve, home to thousands of seabirds. We aim to protect these species while retaining traditional management and providing a high quality visitor experience.

With the exception of the seasonal wardens Noss is uninhabited and retains a strong wild feel much enjoyed by visitors. Visiting Noss is a full experience from the zodiac ferry to meeting the wardens that live there to seeing the tall cliffs packed with gannets. We aim to increase the number of people who can enjoy Noss be it visitors, local families, volunteers or remotely via social media.

Noss is an extremely special place and we aim to manage it for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

## 5 Document properties

**Photography:** Craig Nisbet

**Mapping:** Produced by Geographical Information Unit, SNH.

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**Signed off by:** Lesley Cranna, Area Manager – Northern Isles & North Highland

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### Links

For information about Scotland's National Nature Reserves and further information about Noss NNR please go to [www.snh.org.uk/nnr-scotland](http://www.snh.org.uk/nnr-scotland)

Other useful links:

Scottish Natural Heritage [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

Joint Nature Conservation Committee [www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

Shetland Biological Records Centre: [www.shetlandamenity.org/shetland-biological-records-centre](http://www.shetlandamenity.org/shetland-biological-records-centre)

SOTEAG monitoring reports (includes Noss data):  
[www.soteag.org.uk/environmental-monitoring/monitoring-reports/](http://www.soteag.org.uk/environmental-monitoring/monitoring-reports/)