

CITATION

LOCH SHIEL
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Lochaber)

Site code: 1053

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NM 800720

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 40
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 390 & 391

AREA: 3355.68 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES:

Biological	:	Freshwater habitats:	Oligotrophic loch
	:	Woodlands:	Native pinewood
	:	Woodlands:	Upland oak woodland
	:	Non-vascular plants:	Bryophyte assemblage
	:	Birds (breeding):	Black-throated diver (<i>Gavia arctica</i>)
	:	Butterflies:	Chequered skipper (<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>)

DESCRIPTION:

Loch Shiel Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies just south of Glenfinnan and extends south-west to Acharacle. Loch Shiel is one of the largest oligotrophic glacial lochs in Scotland and is adjoined by extensive remnants of ancient woodland on the steep western slopes. The woods support a bryophyte assemblage of national importance together with a strong population of the chequered skipper butterfly, which has a distribution limited to the north-west of Scotland. The loch supports a breeding population of black-throated divers of European importance. The diverse combination of habitats enhances the importance of this site.

The woods fringing Loch Shiel are dominated by oak and birch with ash and wych elm along the sides of streams, on scree and in ravines. Holly, hazel, willows and rowan are common in places throughout the woods and alder is dominant on wetter flushed ground. Under the oak-birch stands there are grassy moss carpets with vascular plants such as common cow-wheat, wood sorrel, dog's mercury and water avens. There is also a rich fern flora including the 'Atlantic' hay-scented buckler-fern *Dryopteris aemula* and Tunbridge filmy-fern *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*.

There are small stands of native Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* at the northern end of the loch. Together with other stands in northern Ardgour they contribute to the most important remnants of Scots pine woodland in Lochaber and form a component of the South West Group of native pinewoods which are considered to be genetically distinct from those found elsewhere in Scotland. Scots pine dominates the canopy with downy birch frequent throughout. Holly, rowan and sessile oak occur occasionally, with alder fringing water courses. Dead standing and fallen trees are present throughout the woodlands. Beneath pine and birch the field layer is generally

characterised by abundant heather and blaeberry, with sparse cowberry and characteristic herbs.

The exceptional range of mosses and liverworts found within the woods are also of special interest. These include a very rich assemblage of Atlantic species of very limited distribution. Some, such as the liverwort *Plagiochila atlantica*, are found in very few places outwith north-west Scotland.

The woodlands are a valuable habitat for many invertebrate species including the nationally scarce chequered skipper butterfly. This species is only found in the North West of Scotland and can be found in forest glades or paths and where its favoured larval food plant, purple moor grass is found.

The loch is one of the best examples of a large, nutrient-poor loch in North Lochaber. The aquatic flora of Loch Shiel is dominated by species typical of oligotrophic waters including shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and water lobelia *Lobelia dortmanna*, and it is the only remaining natural site in Britain for pigmyweed *Crassula aquatica*. The marginal wetlands are an important component of the aquatic system. These include small stands of common reed, which is an uncommon plant in Lochaber, and provide a habitat for nationally rare and scarce plant species.

Loch Shiel is a productive site for the nationally rare black-throated diver, supporting three pairs, around three times the national average for the British population of this species.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY:

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1971

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 18 March 1991 with a 1234 ha increase in area

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 15 July 2010

REMARKS:

Measured area of site corrected from 3,373.9 ha.

Part of Loch Shiel SSSI is designated as part of Loch Moidart and Loch Shiel Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats and species listed below:

Habitats: Alder woodland on floodplains
Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes
Western acidic oak woodland

Species: Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Part of Loch Shiel SSSI is designated as part of Ardgour Pinewoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats listed below:

Habitats: Alder woodland on floodplains

Caledonian forest

Loch Shiel SSSI is adjacent to Ardgour Pinewoods SSSI and to Claish Moss SSSI.

Part of Loch Shiel SSSI is designated as part of Loch Shiel Special Protection Area (SPA) for Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*).