

CITATION

LOCH STACK AND RIVER LAXFORD SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Highland (Sutherland)

Site code: 1055

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC290430

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 9
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 445

AREA: 727.69 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological	:	Freshwater habitats	:	Oligotrophic loch
			:	Oligotrophic river/stream
	:	Woodlands	:	Upland birch woodland
	:	Birds	:	Breeding bird assemblage
			:	Black-throated diver <i>Gavia arctica</i>
	:	Invertebrates	:	Freshwater pearl mussel <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>

DESCRIPTION

Loch Stack and River Laxford Site of Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in north-west Sutherland between Achfary and Laxford Bridge. The SSSI has been designated because it contains the some of the best examples in Sutherland of the six habitats and species listed above. Each of these habitats and species is nationally important.

Oligotrophic loch (low nutrient loch)

The clear, naturally regulated waters of Loch Stack are low in nutrients and support a range of plants that thrive in these conditions including characteristic species such as quillwort *Isoetes lacustris*, bulbous rush *Juncus bulbosus* and water lobelia *Lobelia dortmanna*. Loch Stack also has the uncommon species awlwort *Subularia aquatica*, and the stoneworts *Nitella opaca* and *Nitella translucens*.

Oligotrophic river (low nutrient river)

The River Laxford is a base-poor river of high water quality which has a range of features whilst supporting a rich and diverse aquatic flora. The fish present are mainly salmonids including salmon *Salmo salar*, brown and sea trout *Salmo trutta*.

Upland birch woodland

The woodland alongside the River Laxford at Creag nan Suidheag Mor is a characteristic example of native broadleaf woodland growing on nutrient-poor soils in the north-west of Scotland. It is a mature, boulder strewn woodland dominated by birch *Betula spp.* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and supports a rich assemblage of notable ferns including Wilson's filmy fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*, notable mosses including *Hypnum callichroum* and lichens.

/see overleaf

Breeding bird assemblage

The loch, its margins and the surrounding moorland support an assemblage of upland breeding birds including black-throated diver *Gavia arctica*, red-throated diver *Gavia stellata* common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, dunlin *Calidris alpina schinzii* and greenshank *Tringa nebularia*.

Black-throated diver

Loch Stack provides a suitable breeding habitat for black-throated diver. Two pairs regularly breed on the loch.

Freshwater pearl mussel

The freshwater pearl mussel is listed as an endangered species (by the International Union for Conservation of Nature) as a result of its dramatic decline throughout its range in northern continents. The River Laxford supports a viable population of freshwater pearl mussel which is slowly recovering from historical exploitation at this site. The populations of Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* and trout *Salmo trutta*, the river bed substrates and the high water quality of the River Laxford are all important for the long-term survival of freshwater pearl mussel in this river.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified as Loch Stack SSSI under the 1949 Act: 1975

Re-notified under the 1981 Act and extended to include the River Laxford: 29 February 1984

Notification reviewed under 2004 Act as Loch Stack and River Laxford SSSI: 21 October 2009

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected from 726.3 ha.

Sitename amended from 'Loch Stack' to 'Loch Stack and River Laxford'.