

CITATION

LOCH WATTEN SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Highland (Caithness)

Site code: 1068

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: ND 230560
OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 11 and 12
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 450 and 451
AREA: 428.35 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological: Freshwater habitats: Base-rich loch
Fens: Open water transition fen
Birds: Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), non-breeding

DESCRIPTION

Loch Watten Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located 12km west of Wick, Caithness. The site is designated for its nationally important open water habitat, the fen vegetation that surrounds the loch and the population of greylag goose that roost here in winter.

Base-rich loch

Loch Watten is one of the two best examples of a base-rich loch in Caithness. The relatively enriched nutrient status and shallow water of Loch Watten support a rich and extensive underwater vegetation of pondweed *Potamogeton* spp., water milfoil *Myriophyllum* spp. and stoneworts *Chara* species. This extends over much of its area. Nine species of pondweed have been recorded from the loch, including two nationally rare species: slender-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton filiformis* and long-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton praelongus*. The locally unusual curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus* also grows here.

Open water transitional fen

The fen and swamp vegetation is particularly well developed at the north-west end of the loch. The drier parts of the fen are dominated by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, soft rush *Juncus effusus* flag iris *Iris pseudacorus* and water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*. Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, water sedge *Carex aquatilis* and common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* are found in the wetter areas. The nationally scarce narrow small reed *Calamagrostis stricta* is also found in this part of the site. The eastern end of the loch has large stands of reed canary-grass near the water's edge.

Greylag goose

Loch Watten is an important roosting site for wintering greylag geese which are present between late September and late April each year. This is one of the largest roost sites in Caithness for this species. Up to 3,000 greylag geese, equivalent to 3% of the British population roost here.

/see overleaf

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1971

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 9 December 1986 with a 17.6 ha increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25 November 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 432.6 ha).

Loch Watten SSSI is also designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitat listed below and as part of the Caithness Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for the birds listed below.

Habitat : Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed

Birds : Greenland white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*), non-breeding
: Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), non-breeding
: Whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), non-breeding