



Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

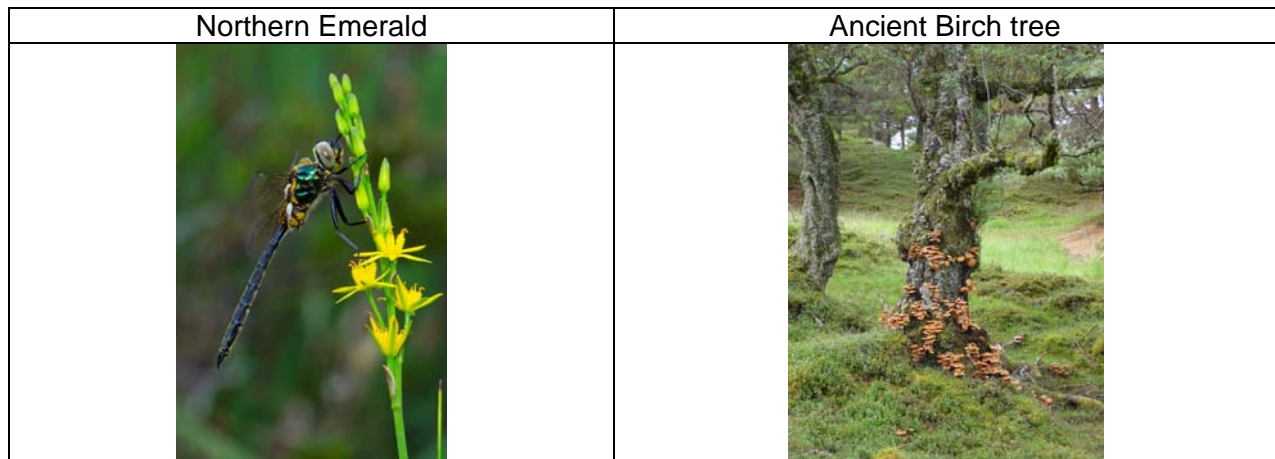
Description of the site

Meggernie and Croch na Keys Woods SSSI comprises two separate relict Caledonian pinewoods situated on slopes both sides of Glen Lyon some 2-5 kilometres west of Bridge of Balgie. The woods range from 200 to 400 metres in altitude and are significant features in a spectacular highland landscape of mountain, wood and glen within the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area. The wood at Meggernie forms part of the setting to Meggernie Castle and its designed landscape. The woods support an insect community which includes beetles and moths associated with native Scots pine woodland; and the Northern Emerald dragonfly which hunts in the shelter of open woodland and breeds in some of the mires in the wood..

The woods together form one of only two relict native pinewood remaining in Perthshire and is one of only 35 surviving ancient pinewood remnants in Scotland. These sites are believed to have been wooded continuously since the retreat of the ice sheets. Although both woods are predominantly Scots pine with some individuals possibly 200 years old, birch is frequent, especially in Meggernie Wood, where there is also some rowan and aspen. The trees in the gorge of the Allt Conait bounding Croch na Keys to the west are largely downy birch.

Birds breeding here in and around the site include merlin, peregrine and black grouse, plus woodland species such as redstart, crossbill, buzzard and spotted flycatcher. Mammals typical of the habitats present on the site are found, including red squirrels and otters. A large number of red deer and some roe deer are present.

Meggernie and Croch na Keys Woods SSSI is adjacent to the River Lyon, part of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its salmon, river, brook and sea lampreys, otter and clearwater lochs.



Current condition of the natural features

The woodlands of the SSSI are in unfavourable (recovering) condition. In the assessment of the woodlands in 2006 condition targets were used such as extent of woodland, maintenance of a supply of standing and fallen dead wood and trees, along with searching for negative indicators like evidence of removal of dead wood. Appraising the condition of the woodland against these targets, an informed judgement of the condition of the features of the SSSI is made. The condition assessment unfavourable recovering is applied to features which while not meeting all targets necessary in order to be considered favourable, have management in place which in time can be expected to lead to the feature being considered in favourable condition. The two key aspects leading to the present unfavourable recovering assessment are first, the immature nature of the regeneration areas, all of which are of an age where there is as yet no canopy cover and second, the mature, unfenced areas where grazing, apparently by deer, is causing failure on shrub layer and ground vegetation targets. The vegetation here is so grazed as to prevent most regeneration, flowering and seeding, and is arresting growth. This in turn restricts and eventually reduces the amount of heather and blaeberry present.

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Meggernie and Croch na Keys SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Native pinewood	Unfavourable recovering (September 2006)	

Past and present management

Meggernie and Croch na Keys Woods were exploited for their timber, primarily Scots Pine, from the 15th century to the 19th. The best trees were taken, with timber floated out. Many trees were destroyed by a storm in December 1879.

The area's long history as a deer forest means there has been past grazing mostly by deer, but also by, sheep, cattle and mountain hares. This, along with muirburn to encourage fresh growth for grazing, had precluded any tree regeneration. Much very good work, supported by both SNH through management agreements and the Forestry Commission through grant schemes, has been carried out by the owners in

the last 20 years to secure natural regeneration of the pinewood. This work is bearing fruit in the increasing extent of regenerating native Scots pine woodland in various enclosures, both within the SSSI (c99ha) and as extensions to it (c105ha).

The one key aspect of present management is the level of grazing by deer within unenclosed woodland. The risk remains that as the regenerating enclosures mature and their fences decay, deer, finding these very attractive for shelter and feed will congregate in number and damage the shrub layer and ground flora. While this is unlikely to destroy the regenerated pine trees it is likely to lead to these areas failing on condition targets. The danger is that while new enclosures may be continuously regenerated, established ones will be accessed and grazed too heavily by deer, and the site will always fall into the 'unfavourable recovering' category.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

The long term goal for the site is to encourage natural regeneration of the Caledonian pinewood ecosystem as a fully functional and sustainable woodland, exhibiting a range of age and structural diversity. This woodland will accommodate all existing species and provide opportunities for an increase in biological diversity. The management objectives are as follows:

1. To maintain or improve the condition and extent of the native pinewood communities and their associated key species by managing habitats to encourage the development in the wood of a diverse age structure and species range.
2. To prevent deterioration and where possible restore the native pine and birch forest communities to their natural distribution across the site.
3. To provide conditions favourable to maintaining viable populations of rare and typical species by promoting regeneration and expansion of woodland in the west of the site.
4. To provide conditions favourable to maintaining viable populations of rare and typical species by promoting grazing regimes which will allow for regeneration while at the same time provide appropriate glade-like conditions vital for the important lower plants of the site.

We will work with owners to protect the site to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management agreement.

Date last reviewed: 06 December 2007