



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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NORTH EAST COLL LOCHS AND MOORS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1230

Address: Cameron House, Albany Street, Oban, Argyll. PA34 4AE
Tel: 0300 244 9360 Email: Argyll_Outerhebrides@snh.gov.uk

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.

This Statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of North East Coll Lochs and Moors SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Blanket bog	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2006)	
Machair	Favourable, declining (August 2013)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (August 2008)	
Greenland white-fronted goose <i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i> , non breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2009)	SPA, Ramsar
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable, declining (August 2014)	
Lichen assemblage	Favourable, maintained (April 2004)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Greenland barnacle goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> , non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2009)	SPA

Description of the site

North East Coll Lochs and Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the Isle

of Coll, in the Sea of the Hebrides 67km to the west of Oban. This SSSI has blanket bog and machair as notified habitats. The large area of peatland habitat is of international importance for the notified overwintering Greenland white-fronted goose and a varied breeding bird assemblage of value within the south west region of Scotland. The diverse habitats in close proximity have encouraged various notified plant assemblages, including rare wetland plants, and unusual and rare species of lichen.

The SSSI includes both acidic and calcareous communities. There is a mosaic of acidic low hilly ground, rock out crops and unimproved grassland throughout most of the site. The calcareous communities are found mostly on the north west coast where blowing sands have created sand dunes and machair.

At Sorisdale, Cornaigbeg and at Airidh Mhaoraich there are areas of rocky headlands sheltering calcareous sandy beaches, sand dunes and machair. Sections of machair at A'Chroic and inland from Traigh Tuath support a species rich red fescue and ladies bedstraw fixed dune grassland and the area inland from Traigh Tuath supports a rich flora with hoary whitlowgrass, frog orchid and adder's-tongue fern, fragrant orchid, and lesser meadow-rue. The condition of the machair is favourable.

An extensive mosaic of acidic blanket bogs and lochans has developed on the low ground between rocky knolls, and it is the largest area of blanket bog on Coll. The vegetation is predominantly deergrass and hare's-tail cottongrass blanket mire. Other plant communities occurring here are; the deergrass and cross-leaved heath community, the reindeer lichen community and the round-leaved sundew and bogmoss sub-community. The condition of the blanket bogs is classified as unfavourable, recovering for several reasons. When monitored in 2006 these interests were over grazed in some areas and there was burning into the peat layer in sensitive areas of the bog.

There is a nationally important assemblage of moorland and wetland breeding birds including merlin and red-throated diver. The open moorland supports one of the most southerly British breeding populations of Arctic skua. Also breeding here are hen harrier, dunlin, great skua and twite. The condition of the breeding bird assemblage is favourable.

The Druim Fishaig area is of international importance as a roost site for Greenland white-fronted geese. This feature was last reported on in 2006 and was found to be in a favourable condition. It is due for reporting again in 2015.

Coll's strongly oceanic climate in combination with the diverse soils supports a rich assemblage of plants. With the cool summers there are also a number of arctic alpine species present and these include bearberry and hoary whitlowgrass. The nationally-scarce and threatened bog orchid is associated with the bog-moss in bog pool communities. The nationally-scarce and threatened bog hair-grass occurs in restricted areas of peaty margins of pools. The Red Data Book nationally-rare Irish lady's tresses is supported by wet heath and rush pasture on the north western periphery of the site. On higher ground and rock outcrops are colonies of juniper. Areas of thinner peat on uneven higher ground are dominated by ling and bell heather with crowberry and bearberry. In the coastal areas between Eileraig and Sorisdale is the species rich plant community of ling and spring squill. Growing here are creeping willow, crowberry, common dog violet, thyme, common birds-foot-trefoil, heath spotted-orchid and northern marsh-orchid.

There are about fifty botanically rich lochs and lochans included within the site boundary, ranging in size from half to six hectares. Many of the lochs support one of the largest British populations of the Red Data Book nationally-rare water pipewort. The nationally-rare slender naiad, the regionally-uncommon spring quillwort and awlwort are also recorded from a number of lochs. The emergent vegetation is rich and varied and includes stands of saw sedge.

The vascular plant assemblage was found to be in a favourable declining condition when last surveyed in 2014. It was assessed as declining as some of the Irish lady's tresses sites were considered as undergrazed.

The site is considered Britain's most important site for machair lichens. Where shell sand is blown across outcrops of Lewisian gneiss at the edge of machair systems there is an unusual juxtaposition of acidic rock and lime rich sandy soils which provide rich habitats for lichens, for instance at A'Chroic and Traigh Tuath. In these habitats, eight nationally-rare species of lichen, including *Lempholemma cladodes*, *Nephroma tangeriense* and *Arthonia atlantica*, and at least thirty nationally-scarce species such as *Pertusaria chiodectonoides*, *Polyblastia wheldonii* and *Sarcogyne clavus*, are currently known. On rocks at the coast near A'Chroic and between Eileraig and Sorisdale are a number of lichens typical of Lobarian lichen communities which are more often found in woodland. The lichen assemblage was in favourable condition when last monitored in 2004.

The nationally-scarce moss *Grimmia longirostris* occurs on rocks in the vicinity of Traigh Tuath and the nationally-scarce sphagnum moss, *Sphagnum platyphyllum*, occurs along the flushed margins of Loch a'Mhill Aird.

The SSSI is included in the Coll SPA because of its internationally-important roosting and feeding population of Greenland white-fronted geese. The SPA also supports internationally-important populations of Greenland barnacle geese, most of which roost within Crossapol and Gunna SSSI, although small numbers use North East Coll Lochs and Moors SSSI.

The site has also been designated as Coll Ramsar site as it is internationally-important for the wetland habitat that supports a migratory population of Greenland white-fronted geese.



Past and present management

Throughout the SSSI there has been extensive grazing by sheep and cattle that has kept the habitat open and benefited the species which are now features of the site.

Much of the blanket bog and wetland area displays evidence of having been drained in the past.

Muirburn was carried out on the dry heathlands, but only infrequently in recent years. There have been several episodes of uncontrolled and extensive muirburn.

Muirburn may increase biodiversity but should avoid blanket bog areas and nesting sites for raptors. Nesting sites for merlin in taller heather are used repeatedly each year, and land owners should be aware of their location so that they are not burned. Approximately half of the SSSI burned in 1996, and other large areas were burned in 1970s and 1980s.

Sand extraction for agricultural purposes has taken place within the site. Liming with shell sand on cultivated fields is a long standing practice. Peat has traditionally been, and continues to be extracted for domestic usage.

West of Scotland Water abstracts a supply of water from Lochan Airigh aon Oidche. A private water supply is taken from Lochan a`Bhaigh for the supply of 'Lilly Loch' at Bousd.

At present, the site is grazed by sheep and cattle however much of this occurs around periphery of this extensive SSSI. Some parts of the site are used for common grazing but most of the arable and unimproved land is fenced into apportionments. Some of these fences and the main road cut through the area which is the natural transition from sandy beaches to inland acid ground, and so interferes with the natural development of these habitats. There are livestock enclosure fences where only seasonal grazing is allowed, and these help to preserve the natural features of the site by allowing seed to set.

Both British Telecom and Scottish Hydro Electric maintain wayleaves on the site.

Informal fishing takes place on a number of the lochans and the shooting rights on several properties have been leased.

There are two contracts under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). Land management benefits the herb rich grassland, coastal heath, wetland and water courses, which in turn benefit the wetland plants, machair habitat, and bird features. The management contracts have recommendations for the following; mowing of machair and grasslands for the management of birds, grazing of coastal heath for the management of the open grasslands, and the stoppage of herbicide use to conserve the headlands. Some of the better arable land is used for hay production and is mown.

In recent years there has been new housing development in a section of the SSSI opposite from the burial ground at Cornaigmoor. This will profoundly change the management of these areas which are now fenced off.

Some land owners manage the land for the great yellow bumble bee on the machair.

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

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and 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 to monitor the effectiveness of the management agreement.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species protected under SPAs and SACs, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, where such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi – SiteLink facility).

- 1. To maintain the regenerative seed bank of the vascular plants in the machair by implementing correct grazing levels and shepherding.** The continuation of extensive grazing by cattle and sheep is an important aspect of maintaining the diverse vegetation of the site. Localised detrimental effect of high grazing on the fixed dune grassland to the south-east of the road at A'Chroic has led to infrequent flowering and poor seed set.
- 2. To maintain or increase the extent of machair and blanket bog.** The threat of housing development is having an impact on the machair and birds. Any further drainage may be detrimental to the wetland interests. The present rate of water extraction appears to be sustainable.
- 3. To keep the openness of the blanket bog and machair that supports the lichen assemblage, bird roosting and nesting sites.** By carrying out muirburn according to The Muirburn Code. The grazing, or where appropriate mowing of machair and grasslands is beneficial for the management of birds, and the grazing of coastal heath is beneficial for the flowering plant species and nesting birds.
- 4. Damage to the machair and blanket bog should be avoided during the processes of sand, gravel and peat extraction.** The extraction of sand, gravel and peat can be sustained at present levels provided the present quarries and peat banks are kept to the current sites uses. An increase in extraction rates will require the land owner to seek consent from the Local Authority.
- 5. To maintain and increase the connectivity between the habitats.** Historically the site has been managed as open grazing with less fencing, and this is preferable because there is freedom of stock movement. This results in more sensitive grazing management for the site.

Date last reviewed: June 2015