

CITATION

NORTH EAST COLL LOCHS AND MOORS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Argyll and Bute

Site code: 1230

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NM 243608

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 46
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 372

AREA: 2317.61 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological : **Bogs** : **Blanket bog**
: **Coastlands** : **Machair**
: **Birds** : **Breeding bird assemblage**
: **Greenland white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*), non-breeding**
: **Vascular plants** : **Vascular plant assemblage**
: **Non-vascular plants** : **Lichen assemblage**

DESCRIPTION

North East Coll Lochs and Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the northernmost third of the Isle of Coll, in the Inner Hebrides. 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 *Anser albifrons flavirostris* and a varied breeding bird assemblage of value within the south west region of Scotland. The diverse habitats support various notified plant assemblages, including rare wetland plants, and an unusual and rare species of lichen.

The SSSI includes both acidic and calcareous communities. There is a mosaic of acidic low hilly ground, rock outcrops 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.

An extensive system 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 *Trichophorum cespitosum* and hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire. Other communities include deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* community, the reindeer lichen *Cladonia* spp. community and the round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and bog moss *Sphagnum* spp. sub-community with locally abundant black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*.

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 *Festuca rubra* and ladies bedstraw *Galium verum* fixed dune grassland and the area inland from Traigh Tuath

supports a rich flora with hoary whitlowgrass *Draba incana*, frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride* and adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, and lesser meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus*.

There is a nationally-important assemblage of moorland and wetland breeding birds including merlin *Falco columbarius* and red-throated diver *Gavia stellata*. The open moorland supports one of the most southerly British breeding populations of Arctic skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Also breeding here are hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, great skua *Stercorarius skua* and twite *Carduelis flavirostris*.

The Druim Fishaig area is of international importance as a roost site for Greenland white-fronted geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris*.

There are about fifty botanically-rich lochs and lochans included within the site, ranging in size from half to six hectares. Several of the lochs support one of the largest British populations of the nationally-rare Red Data Book species water pipewort *Eriocaulon aquaticum*, and one loch supports a population of the nationally-rare slender naiad *Najas flexilis* and the nationally rare *Potamogeton coloratus*. The regionally-uncommon spring quillwort *Isoetes echinospora* and awlwort *Subularia aquatica* are also recorded from a number of lochs. The nationally-scarce and threatened bog hair-grass *Deschampsia setacea* is found in the peaty margins of several of the lochs. The nationally-scarce and threatened bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* is associated with the bog-moss *Sphagnum auriculatum* and is found in flushed areas around two of the lochs.

The Red Data Book nationally-rare Irish lady's tresses orchid *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* is found in wet heath and rush pasture on the north-western periphery of the site.

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 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*, *Atla 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.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 10 December 1993.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 17 November 2010,

Citation revised: 09 June 2015.

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 2315.01 ha)

Part of North East Coll Lochs and Moors SSSI is overlapped by Coll Special Protection Area (SPA), which is designated for the birds listed below.

Birds : Greenland barnacle goose (*Branta leucopsis*), non-breeding
: Greenland white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*), non-breeding