BALLAGAN GLEN
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 125

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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.

Natural Features of Ballagan Glen SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Stratigraphy – Lower Carboniferous [Dinantian-Namurian (part)]	Favourable, maintained August 2001	None
Upland mixed ash woodland	Favourable, maintained May 2008	None

Description of the site

Ballagan Glen is a steep-sided glen on the south face of the Campsie Fells, less than a mile east of the village of Strathblane, to the north of Glasgow. The upper limit of the glen is a waterfall above a feature known as the Spout of Ballagan.

In early Carboniferous times (around 340 million years ago) Scotland had a warm tropical climate. The area which is now the central lowlands was low-lying coastal land and was periodically inundated by a shallow sea. The landscape was constantly changing due to fluctuating sea levels with successive marine, delta-beach, freshwater lagoon and river-plain environments. It was in one of these freshwater lagoons that lime, sands and muds were deposited which were to become the cementstones, sandstones and mudstones known as the Ballagan Beds. Analysis of the sequence of exposures at Ballagan Glen has yielded much information about both the ancient geography and environment.

The underlying geology and soils have given rise to ancient broadleaved gorge woodland with nutrient-rich soils. The tree canopy is dominated by ash with frequent to occasional hazel, alder, bird cherry, birch, rowan and gean. The ground flora is characterised by species associated with these soil conditions and includes enchanter's nightshade, dog's mercury, sweet woodruff, yellow pimpernel, and moschatel. The pendulous sedge occurs here at one of its few locations in the area.

Wet ashwoods of this type are uncommon in the Stirling Council area, and this site, although relatively small, is very species-rich.

The geological feature was last monitored in 2001 and found to be in favourable, maintained condition; whilst the woodland feature was most recently monitored in May 2008 and also found to be in favourable, maintained condition.

Ballagan Beds Geological feature	Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserve
	

Past and present management

Ballagan Glen formed part of the 'Kirklands of Strathblane' in the mid 17th century, and historically the Ballagan burn was a source of power for the Ballagan Mill (of which there are no traces now). The waterfalls at the Spout of Ballagan, and the prominent geological exposures, have been an attraction to visitors and geologists over the centuries.

The woodland was used as shelter for grazing stock until relatively recently - mostly sheep but also cattle and horses, as well as being a source of timber and fuel. During the 1980s and 1990s it was recognised that high grazing levels were having a detrimental impact on the woodland, with little natural regeneration of the trees and impoverishment of the ground flora.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) first established a Reserve at Ballagan Glen in 1966 under an agreement with the former landowners. Much of the site was then purchased by SWT in 1977, with the remainder of the site managed since 1999 under an agreement with the owner, and there is a long-established Ballagan Glen Reserve Management Group. Various management plans have been produced over the years, with the most recent plan (covering the period 2001 to 2011) currently under review.

In 1998 SWT secured funding through the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust to construct a stock-proof fence around the site to exclude livestock; undertake bracken control on some areas of the site, provide an interpretive panel and reserve leaflets and collect tree seeds for cultivation. This work was undertaken during the period 1999/2000. In 2001 the Reserves Enhancement project (major funder Heritage Lottery Fund) provided further funds for fencing upgrades; and vegetation and invertebrate surveys, and this has all been very positive for the site features

The stock fencing has allowed natural regeneration to take place, and during the monitoring undertaken in 2008 an approximate 5% expansion of woodland area through young trees, primarily ash but also occasional oak, birch, rowan, hazel and hawthorn was noted, with existing blackthorn stands also increasing in area. New regeneration was chiefly adjacent to existing woodland blocks or within the canopy.

Few new trees had appeared within the blocks of heath and grassland to the East of the site.

Part of the SSSI, to the south of the site and adjacent to Ballagan House, was given a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) designation by Stirling Council in 1974.

The Reserve is relatively little visited by the public, mainly due to limited access opportunities and the lack of a formal path network. However, educational use of the Reserve is welcomed by SWT.

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

We wish to work with land managers 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 plan.

A list of Operations Requiring Consent, and the discussions on land management involved in the issuing of formal consents, are intended to minimise the threat of any damage to the natural features.

1. To maintain unobscured rock outcrops

Ensure that rock faces do not become obscured by tree regeneration, whilst minimising the impact on the woodland.

2. To maintain the condition and extent of the woodland feature

Maintain the stock fence around the site to encourage further natural regeneration and extension of the woodland; continue to treat problem areas of bracken to encourage further woodland regeneration in these areas; monitor deer browsing and, if this significantly affects natural regeneration, consider using tubes to protect tree seedlings; continue to monitor, and if necessary remove, non-natives; leave fallen and standing dead wood, including dead tree limbs, wherever it is safe to do so.

3. To maintain and enhance opportunities for recreation, education and access

Small numbers of walkers and naturalists already visit the site, however there are no paths within the site and the ground is steep and, in places, unstable. Therefore maintain safe access to the site for recreation, education and research purposes and provide clear warnings about site hazards. Encourage the collection of further biological records from the site and also consider enhancing facilities – e.g. car parking and footpaths – which could help to make the site more accessible.

Date last reviewed: 19 November 2009