



Purpose



Ramna Stacks from Gruney
– June 2004

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 Ramna Stacks and Gruney SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Leach's petrel (<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>)	Favourable, maintained (June 2004)	Special Protection Area
Seabird colony	Unfavourable, declining (June 2001)	
Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>)	Unfavourable, declining (June 2001)	

Description of the site

Ramna Stacks and Gruney Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated approximately 2 km off the northernmost point of mainland Shetland. Gruney and Fladda are peat-covered with the vegetation mainly composed of coastal grassland enriched in some areas by high concentrations of sea bird droppings. The remaining stacks, including Ramna Stacks, are largely composed of bare rock.

The Islands are particularly noted for their internationally important breeding population of Leach's petrel of which there are approximately 20 pairs. Although the colony is not significant in terms of the number of breeding pairs, it is internationally important as one of only seven known colonies in Britain, and one of eight within the European Community. A monitoring visit in June 2004 confirmed that petrels were still breeding in burrows in the turf on Gruney.

The islands are also nationally important for their colony of breeding seabirds. As well as the Leach's petrel, this assemblage includes the storm petrel, fulmar, great-black-backed gull, kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill, black guillemot and puffin. Surveys in June 2001 showed that numbers of guillemot (itself a notified feature of the SSSI) and the seabird assemblage in total had declined significantly. There were 8800 guillemots in the SSSI at time of notification, but only 2033 in 2001. During the same period the total for the assemblage declined from 20,000 to just 3181 individuals.

No reduction in quality or area of habitat was noted during the survey and it was thought that outside factors affecting prey availability was the major influence on the populations. No change in local management was proposed.

In autumn, a locally important population of grey seals use Gruney for pupping.

Past and present management

Although there have been no sheep on the island since 2005, the tenant has previously managed the land for grazing a small number of sheep (23 were present at the time of the most recent monitoring visit). These sheep were on the island for summer fattening – no lambing takes place here – and required only two visits per year. It is possible that grazing will occur again in the future. There is no record of past management.

Ramna Stacks are owned by RSPB Scotland and operated as a bird reserve.

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

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

SNH encourages applications to relevant schemes such as Rural Development Contracts (Rural Priorities) that aim to deliver positive management consistent with site objectives.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as 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 protect the site's populations of important breeding seabirds by preventing ground predator introduction.

The only likely mechanism of introduction of ground predators is through deliberate or accidental transport while accessing the island by boat.

2. To maintain favourable conditions by avoiding significant disturbance

Disturbance is unlikely due to the isolation and limited accessibility.

3. To maintain a level of grazing that ensures vegetation growth does not limit access to burrows for Leach's petrels.

It is thought that undergrazing would have a detrimental effect on the Leach's petrel colony by allowing long grass to block the burrows. Maintenance at previous levels

of intensity (approx 20 gimmers during summer) is appropriate.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

External Factors: Seabirds are dependent on food resources from outwith the SSSI and the conservation interest of the site is therefore vulnerable to changes brought about by such factors as marine pollution and fisheries.

Date last reviewed: 19 August 2008