



Scottish Natural Heritage

ROSLIN GLEN
Site of Special Scientific Interest

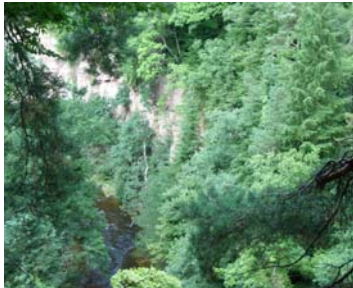
SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1378

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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.

Description of the site

Roslin Glen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a mixed deciduous valley woodland consisting predominantly of ash, oak and elm. It is the largest of its kind remaining in Midlothian, and the most diverse, and has been recorded since the 12th century. The woodland is semi-natural and represents a once common habitat, now one of the rarest in western Europe. Roslin Glen woodland, however, was protected from destruction by its location, as the steep-sided valley made extraction of trees too difficult and too expensive.

The majority of the SSSI falls within the designed landscape of Roslin Glen and Hawthornden Castle, which also encompasses Hewan Bank SSSI and an area of Bilston Burn SSSI to the north. This would account for the variety of mature exotic policy woodland found throughout much of the SSSI. The most southerly compartment of the SSSI largely comprises Roslin Glen Wildlife Reserve, leased and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).



In the woodland there are examples of all the major native tree species in Scotland, although, unfortunately, sycamore and beech are also gaining a hold. Another relatively recent event has been the occurrence of Dutch elm disease, which decimated the elm population in the 1980s but provided an excellent source of dead or dying timber, both standing and fallen, in the woodland. However, despite these problems, the woodland has a good age structure, and has a species-rich understorey which adds to its structural diversity. The ground flora is characteristic of ancient woodland and contains great wood rush, wood sorrel and dog's mercury, amongst other species. There are also rarities present, including rough horsetail, great horsetail, wood sedge

and pendulous sedge.

The diverse topography of the site gives rise to a wide variety of physical conditions, resulting in a large range of higher plants (over 200 species of flowering plant have been recorded) and also a rich lichen flora. A wide range of breeding birds have been recorded on the site, and bird boxes are now in place for their use throughout the SWT Wildlife Reserve. Bat boxes have also been set up within the reserve area. Finally, in the whole woodland there is a rich insect fauna present, including locally scarce spiders and moths.

The 2008 site condition monitoring (SCM) assessment of the woodland feature found it to be in an unfavourable condition overall. This was due to an excessive amount of non-native beech and sycamore specimens recorded throughout much of the woodland.

Natural features of Roslin Glen SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Upland mixed ash woodland	Unfavourable - declining (August 2008)

Woodland canopy	Great horsetail (<i>Equisetum telmateia</i>)
	

Past and present management

In Blaeu's 1630 Atlas, which is probably based on plates engraved at the time of the surveyor Timotheus Pont (circa 1590s), the woodland at Roslin is shown to be enclosed in a palisade fence or as a Park.

There has been grazing, tree planting and felling carried out in Roslin Glen, but, compared to other local woodlands, this historical management has not been intensive. In fact, for the last 80 years, the woodland has generally been left undisturbed, apart from recreational usage. Walks in the woodland have been popular since Victorian times when naturalists, amongst others, used to come botanising in the woods (and make off with various rare plants in the name of science and learning). The nearby Rosslyn Chapel and, to a lesser extent, Rosslyn Castle, are popular tourist attractions, and the visiting public may wander into the woods afterwards for a walk.

SWT were for a long time interested in the site and, in 1980, managed to lease part of it for the establishment of a Wildlife Reserve. This reserve area has been managed for nature conservation ever since.

Within the SWT Wildlife Reserve, management is carried out according to nature conservation principles. There is a Management Committee which meets at least twice a year to decide on management objectives and on work to be done within the reserve. Most of the practical work undertaken relies on the SWT Conservation Team and there are also a number of dedicated voluntary wardens who devote a lot of time to monitoring the reserve, noting any problems such as wind-blown trees, fly-tipping or vandalism.

Since 1980, there has been considerable work carried out to upgrade the reserve's fences and paths. Litter clearance is also a major and on-going task, regularly undertaken by volunteers. In recent years, metal bollards have been installed at major access points with the aim of reducing fly-tipping - formerly a major problem.

Regular species and habitat monitoring is carried out within the Wildlife Reserve, which includes checking bird and bat boxes. There is also an ongoing tree monitoring programme which aims to ensure that trees are monitored on at least a ten-year cycle, with survey information from 1983 being used as a base-line guide. In each survey, records are taken of the various tree species present, their distribution within the woodland and the distribution of their dbh (diameter at breast height) classes. In doing so, this will allow SWT to build a picture of the woodland as a dynamic environment, to monitor how it has changed over time and to help inform future management.

Woodland management within the reserve has included a programme of sycamore, beech and elm removal. Removal of the two exotics will also remove internal seed sources of these species (although seeds could still travel in from outside the reserve) and will also allow more space and light for the establishment and growth of native tree species. Removal of the elm is a precaution for public safety (i.e. the limbs of dead elm are a hazard if they are likely to fall) and also slows down the spread of Dutch Elm disease (if it can't be stopped completely).

There is ongoing removal of sycamore seedlings as this species is highly invasive and continues to establish, despite the removal of adult trees. Finally, another invasive, non-native plant (this time of the ground layer vegetation) - Japanese knotweed - is also controlled as it tends to establish every few years in patches around the reserve.

A new 10-year SWT Reserve Management Plan is due to be produced in 2010.

Outwith the SWT Wildlife Reserve, the Roslin Glen woodland is in private ownership. It is not actively managed but some planting of native broadleaves has occurred in the past to replace elms lost through Dutch elm disease. As most of the historical survey information obtained to date is associated with the SWT Reserve, these areas would benefit from comprehensive vegetation, bird, mammal and invertebrate surveys in the future.

The whole woodland is an urban fringe site, with settlements close by, and so there is high recreational use. This is unlikely to diminish in the future. There is also high local community awareness of the site, and so any management which is carried out is under public scrutiny.

Finally, the divided ownership of Roslin Glen SSSI and the involvement of SWT as tenants in one area mean that management over the site is split. This is likely to lead to differences in woodland development depending on its location within the SSSI. That is, the area outwith the wildlife reserve is in private ownership and so any proactive management for nature conservation will require the agreement and support of the landowners.

In the future, the site could benefit from entry into an appropriate Rural Development Contract scheme which will be run under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) (available 2007-2013). This could offer benefits for positive woodland management and should aim to protect and enhance the nature conservation value of the site, encourage greater age and structural diversity, and promote the removal of non-native species. At present, sycamore and beech (both non-native species) are beginning to establish in the woodland, and, if not controlled, these could significantly alter the composition of tree species in the future, as well as altering the quality of ground vegetation present.

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.

- 1. Maintain the extent of native woodland habitats as defined in the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Survey (2004).**
- 2. Continue the removal of exotic tree species (both mature trees and saplings) with native replanting where necessary in the SWT Reserve and extend this activity to the SSSI as a whole.**
- 3. Control the establishment and spread of non-native invasive ground flora throughout the SSSI, including Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, Giant hogweed and Few-flowered leek.**
- 4. Maintain significant quantities (20 – 30 cubic metres per hectare) of deadwood, both standing and fallen.**

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Path improvement work has served to encourage public access to the SWT Reserve; however, more recently, mountain-biking has become an issue of concern, with bikers constructing jumps and creating routes to the detriment of the woodland. Mountain bike usage and the subsequent damage caused should be monitored closely in the future.

Date last reviewed: 10 March 2010