

CITATION

ROUSAY
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Orkney Islands

Site code: 1386

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: HY 400305, HY 441333

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 6
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 464

AREA: 2309.97 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological:

Bogs:	Blanket bog
Coastlands:	Maritime cliff
Freshwater habitats:	Mesotrophic loch
Upland habitats:	Subalpine wet heath
Vascular plants:	Vascular plant assemblage
Birds:	Breeding bird assemblage (moorland)
	Seabird colony, breeding
	Arctic skua (<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>), breeding
	Arctic tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>), breeding
	Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>), breeding
	Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>), breeding

DESCRIPTION:

Rousay Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the island of Rousay and covers a significant part of the interior of the island along with sections of coast to the west and north and a portion of Faraclett Head. The interior area includes blanket bog, heathland, and freshwater habitats which all exhibit unusual characteristics. Coastal cliffs support a rich and diverse vegetation which demonstrates a strong maritime influence. A nationally important assemblage of vascular plants occurs within these habitats. The cliffs support a range of seabirds which breed in nationally significant numbers. The bog and heath of the interior also support nationally important numbers of breeding moorland birds.

Away from the coastal fringe, much of the site comprises areas of wet heath and blanket bog. The latter is notable for abundant areas of active peat forming sphagnum moss, *Sphagnum spp.* On higher ground, wet heath communities contain species usually found at much higher altitudes, such as Alpine bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpinus*, Alpine saw-wort *Saussurea alpina* and dwarf willow *Salix herbacea*. The high degree of exposure enables these plants to survive at much lower altitudes than is usual. Numerous nutrient rich flushes occur within the wet heath. These result from spring water passing through marl horizons within the underlying Rousay flagstone. These flushes are characterised by black bog rush *Schoenus nigricans*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, various sedges *Carex spp.* and grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*.

The SSSI supports an extensive area of maritime cliff. This includes the cliff top vegetation and the coastal grasslands and heath which are influenced by the strong onshore winds and salt spray. Plants such as sea plantain and thrift are dominant here, but merge with areas of heath containing dwarf shrubs such as heather, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and bell heather *Erica cinerea*. The nationally scarce Scottish primrose *Primula scotica* thrives in these habitats.

Muckle Water is a good example of a mesotrophic loch (containing moderate amounts of nutrients). The nutrient level is unusual within a catchment comprising blanket bog, which is nutrient poor. The loch shows the influence which the underlying rock has on the aquatic environment. Muckle Water supports several species of pondweed, including the nationally scarce hybrid *Potamogeton x angustifolius* and is the only known Orkney site for *P. lucens*.

The SSSI supports an important assemblage of nationally scarce vascular plants including round-leaved wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia*, Scottish primrose *Primula scotica*, serrated wintergreen *Orthilia secunda*, and shady horsetail *Equisetum pratense*.

These habitats provide important breeding sites for a variety of birds. Arctic tern and Arctic skua, which use the areas of coastal heath on the west-facing slopes of Faraclett, Quendal and Brings, reach numbers which represent 1% and 2% respectively of the Great Britain breeding population. The site is also important for other moorland breeding birds including red-throated diver, wigeon, teal, common sandpiper, hen harrier, merlin, red grouse, golden plover, dunlin, snipe, curlew, great skua, short-eared owl, stonechat, wheatear, raven and twite.

The seacliffs from Rough of Scabra to Saviskaill Head support an extensive mixed colony of breeding seabirds. This forms one of the major colonies in Orkney. The species present include fulmar, razorbill, puffin, shag, black guillemot, herring and great black-backed gulls. The numbers of breeding guillemots and kittiwakes in this part of the site are of national importance.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1973 as Muckle Water SSSI and Sacquoy Head SSSI.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 23 March 1989 with a 2174 ha increase in area.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 23 August 1999 with a 3 ha net decrease in area after more accurate measurement taken.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 19 January 2012

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 2309.7 ha).

Part of Rousay SSSI is part of Rousay Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the birds listed below.

- Birds : Arctic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), breeding
- : Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), breeding
- : Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), breeding
- : Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding
- : Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), breeding
- : Seabird assemblage, breeding

