



BALNAGUARD GLEN
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 139

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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.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

Balnaguard Glen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated 5 miles east of Aberfeldy, on the north east facing slopes above Balnaguard village, overlooking the River Tay. The Balnaguard Burn flows down through the eastern section of the site.

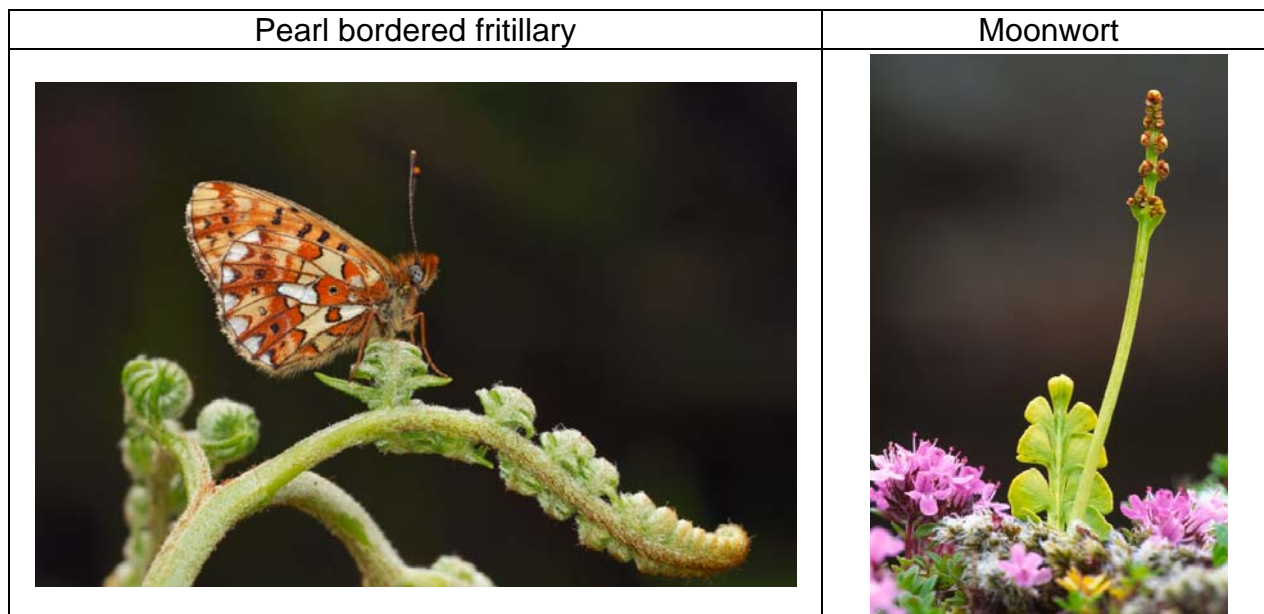
Balnaguard Glen was selected for its juniper woodland - a rare and declining habitat type in Britain as a result of changes in land use and the decline of traditional management practises. This site contains an extensive area of juniper (the third largest in Perth and Kinross) along with mixed gorge and birch woodland. The site is notable for the regeneration of juniper on the eroding slopes above Balnaguard Burn. The burn has cut deeply into the soft glacial deposits flanking the Tay valley and new habitats are created by periodic landslips, common along this gorge, due to seasonal flooding and frosts. Upstream there is a waterfall where the burn flows over an area of hard rock (schist) into the gorge. Where the slopes have stabilised, juniper, heath and grassland communities have taken hold.

The site is chiefly of importance for its juniper woodland which lies immediately adjacent to the gorge and on gentler slopes to the west side of Balnaguard Burn, covering around 50 acres. A wide range of growth forms are present, but do not appear to be regenerating. The trees are used by deer for shelter and the ground flora is grazed.

Also of interest is an area of mixed deciduous woodland (hazel, rowan and willow) and its rich and varied ground flora (with a number of locally uncommon plant species like wintergreens, sanicle, moonwort and alpine bistort), which occurs in the gorge near the

rock outcrops at the Falls of Balnaguard. The site has some open areas of species-rich grassland, with high moss cover in places. At the highest part of the site the grassland gives way to heath vegetation with ling heather and other dwarf shrubs like bell heather, cross-leaved heath and crowberry present.

The site is also noted for its insect populations, which include a number of rare flies, butterflies (including pearl-bordered fritillary) and moths.



Current condition of the natural features

The condition of the juniper scrub was last monitored in 2004 and it was judged to be **unfavourable recovering**. The site failed to meet the target for the proportion of juniper bushes bearing fruit (>10%), however as numerous pioneer bushes were recorded in the southern sections of the site this situation should remedy itself over time.

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Balnaguard Glen SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)
Juniper scrub	Unfavourable recovering (September 2004)

Past and present management

Many of the juniper trees at Balnaguard Glen are thought to be aged around 80-90 years - growing after a reduction in stocking around 1915. Before the early 1900's (1904) the farming tenant of the Grandtully Estate had a reputation as a vigorous improver making maximum use of the hill land and maintaining a regime of heavy grazing by sheep and possibly cattle. This was followed by decline and neglect during the period 1910 - 1935 (approx.) under a farming tenant who had little interest in the out-grazings and kept virtually no stock on the farm.

Since the mid 1930's up to the end of 1996, the present tenants, the McBeth family, used the glen and adjacent slopes as cattle wintering ground. In practice, grazing by stock (both sheep and cattle) occurred almost all year round as an absence of stock fencing

meant that stock were free to move in and out of the gorge and juniper areas at will. While this regime allowed the well-established birch and juniper to grow unimpeded, regeneration has been severely limited by the cattle, sheep and rabbit grazing.

In 1976 Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) entered into a reserve management agreement with the landowner of the eastern portion of the SSSI, to allow Balnaguard Glen to be managed as a wildlife reserve. The SWT purchased the land in the western section in 1980, extending the SWT Reserve to encompass virtually the whole of the SSSI. Currently, although SWT manages the SSSI as a nature reserve, the eastern section of the site is also managed under an agricultural tenancy.

Since 1980, when SWT bought of the western section of the site and erected a stock fence, grazing has been very light, as apart from the occasional wandering sheep, stock has been largely excluded.

In 1996, as part of a Woodland Grant Scheme, a perimeter fence was erected around the remainder of the reserve to reduce grazing pressure, with the hope of encouraging regeneration. There followed a growth of widely scattered young juniper bushes – possibly suppressed by the previous grazing, then growing rapidly with the lifting of grazing pressure. However the exclusion of stock has also led to a vigorous growth of grasses and the development of a dense thatch which is at the moment hindering regeneration. With the end of the Woodland Grant Scheme commitment to exclude grazing until 2006, SWT, and the tenant, have reintroduced limited summer grazing with cattle on a section of the SSSI for a trial period to reduce the thatch of grass and thereby produce conditions more conducive to juniper seedling establishment.

Over the years various experimental exclusion plots have been set up on the SSSI to investigate the regeneration of Juniper. Currently SWT are conducting an investigation into the grazing pressure (primarily deer) on the heathland areas and have erected a small temporary deer enclosure.

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

The long term goal for the site is to ensure the continuation of the juniper scrub woodland by encouraging diversity of age structure.

1. To maintain or improve the condition and extent of the juniper scrub woodland by ensuring conditions are appropriate for regeneration.

The promotion of juniper regeneration to develop a diverse age structure is vital to ensure the long term survival of the juniper on the site.

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

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

None

Date last reviewed: 26 March 2009