

CITATION

SLETILL PEATLANDS
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Sutherland, Caithness)

Site code: 1443

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC961463

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 10, 11
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 449

AREA: 2985.46 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological : **Bogs** : **Blanket bog**
: **Birds** : **Breeding bird assemblage**
Common scoter *Melanitta nigra*, breeding
Dunlin *Calidris alpina schinzii*, breeding
Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, breeding
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, breeding

DESCRIPTION

Sletill Peatlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covers an area of blanket bog midway along the Sutherland/Caithness border, 6km northeast of Forsinard. It lies within a vast expanse of blanket bog that extends across Sutherland and Caithness, forming part of one of the largest tracts of blanket bog in the world. The site is nationally important for its blanket bog habitat and assemblage of breeding birds. The populations of common scoter, dunlin, golden plover and greenshank that nest here are each nationally important in their own right. Parts of the site are being restored to blanket bog from conifer plantation.

Blanket bog

Sletill Peatlands SSSI is an extensive area of blanket bog, encompassing a range of peatlands, lochans, and pool-and-ridge systems. Watershed mire is the most widespread type of blanket bog on this site, found typically between the altitudinal range of 150 and 200 metres. The gently undulating terrain also supports saddle, terrace and valley-side mires. Much of the blanket bog vegetation is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum*, deer sedge *Trichophorum cespitosum* and bog myrtle *Myrica gale*. The flatter parts of the site are much wetter and rich in *Sphagnum* mosses, including the hummock forming species *S. magellanicum*, *S. fuscum* and the nationally scarce *S. austinii*. Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and the nationally scarce dwarf birch *Betula nana* can also be found on this site.

Breeding bird assemblage

The extent and diversity of the blanket bog habitat, with its lochs, smaller lochans, peaty pools and small burns, provide ideal conditions for waders and waterbirds to nest and rear their chicks. Species present include black-throated diver, red-

throated diver, common scoter, wigeon, greenshank, dunlin, golden plover, hen harrier and merlin.

Common scoter, dunlin, golden plover and greenshank

The high breeding densities of dunlin, golden plover and greenshank are particularly notable. Small lochs on the site provide habitat for breeding common scoter.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 14 November 1991

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 3 March 2011

Extension notified under the 2004 Act: 25 August 2022 covering 821 ha

REMARKS

Sletill Peatlands SSSI is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below and part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the birds listed below.

Habitats : Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds
: Blanket bog
: Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
: Depressions on peat substrates
: Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface
: Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

Species : Marsh saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*)
: Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Birds : Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), breeding
: Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), breeding
: Dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), breeding
: Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), breeding
: Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), breeding
: Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), breeding
: Hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), breeding
: Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), breeding
: Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), breeding
: Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), breeding
: Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), breeding
: Wood sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), breeding