

## CITATION

### ST CYRUS AND KINNABER LINKS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Aberdeenshire / Angus

Site code: 1468

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NO745630; NO728627; NO736634

OS 1:50 000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 45  
1:25 000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 382

AREA: 304.91 ha.

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological	:	Coastlands	:	Sand dune
			:	Shingle
			:	Saltmarsh
	:	Lowland grassland	:	Lowland neutral grassland
	:	Vascular plants	:	Vascular plant assemblage
	:	Birds	:	Breeding bird assemblage
	:	Invertebrates	:	Moths
	:	Butterflies	:	Small blue <i>Cupido minimus</i>

## DESCRIPTION

St Cyrus and Kinnaber Links SSSI is located on the east coast of Scotland, on either side of the mouth and estuary of the River North Esk, about 5 km north of Montrose. The varied site consists of sand dunes, shingle, foreshore, river estuary, saltmarsh and cliffs composed of basalts and andesites of Old Red Sandstone age. The cliffs have weathered to produce a moderately base-rich soil, and for the north-east of Scotland the site enjoys relatively long hours of sunshine.

### Sand dune and shingle

To the north of the estuary, the extensive sand dune system at St Cyrus ranges from embryo and mobile dunes to semi-fixed dunes and fixed dune grassland. Characteristic sand dune species include marram grass *Ammophila arenaria*, lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius*, sand couch *Elytrigia juncea*, restharrow *Ononis repens* and sand sedge *Carex arenaria*.

A shingle strandline community with sea sandwort *Honckenya peploides* and sea kale *Crambe maritima* can be found below the cliffs at the north end of the site and similar habitat also occurs around the estuary.

Kinnaber Links is a gently undulating area of largely fixed sand and shingle deposits supporting dune grassland and a good example of lichen-rich dune heath, dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and *Cladonia* lichens.

## Saltmarsh

The dynamic estuary of the North Esk frequently changes the patterns of sand dune, shingle and saltmarsh, with recent reductions in the extent of saltmarsh. The largest remaining area is found around a tidal creek at the Fluke Hole, amongst the Kinnaber sand dunes. It is mainly upper marsh characterised by species such as red fescue *Festuca rubra* and couch *Elymus repens*, with locally frequent saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardii* and sea-milkwort *Glaux maritima*. Saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia maritima* and slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* are also found. At St Cyrus a former channel of the North Esk has been blocked by a new foredune and the associated saltmarsh has been reduced to a narrow strip.

## Grassland

The cliff slope grasslands are locally rich in plant species of base-rich soils such as marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, bloody crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum*, cowslip *Primula veris* and wood vetch *Vicia sylvatica*.

## Vascular plants

The dunes, cliffs, grasslands and saltmarsh support a diverse flora. In total over 300 species of vascular plant have been recorded. Rare species at or near the northern limit of their range in Britain include Nottingham catchfly *Silene nutans* var. *smithiana*, yellow vetch *Vicia lutea* and clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, which is widespread. Sea wormwood *Seriphidium maritimum*, purple milk vetch *Astragalus danicus*, maiden pink *Dianthus deltoides*, wild liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, rough clover *Trifolium scabrum*, knotted clover *T. striatum*, viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*, hemp-agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, field madder *Sherardia arvensis*, field garlic *Allium oleraceum* and wild onion *Allium vineale* are also found.

## Birds

The breeding bird assemblage, about 60 regular breeding species, includes fulmar, shelduck, eider, curlew, redshank, ringed plover, oystercatcher, sedge warbler, grasshopper warbler, wheatear, stonechat, whinchat, kestrel, buzzard, sparrowhawk and peregrine. A fluctuating breeding colony of little terns was present on the sand and shingle up to the 1980s.

## Invertebrates

The floristic diversity is paralleled by a rich and remarkable invertebrate fauna. The site possesses the most diverse moth and butterfly fauna of any site in Eastern Scotland. The moth fauna is especially rich with many scarce Scottish species such as the shore wainscot *Mythimna litoralis*, *Adaina microdactyla*, *Metzneria lappella*, *Cochylidia rupicola*, and, at its only known Scottish locality, *Elachista subocellea*.

The site is also one of the a few localities in Aberdeenshire for the small blue butterfly *Cupido minimus*.

## **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1949 Act as two separate sites, St Cyrus SSSI and Kinnaber Links SSSI, in 1955 and 1974 respectively.

First notified under the 1981 Act on 17 February 1989 as St Cyrus and Kinnaber Links SSSI with an increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 29 May 2009.

## **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected (from 311.8 ha).