

## CITATION

**SUMBURGH HEAD**  
**SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**  
Shetland Islands

Site code: 1508

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: HU 408091

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 4  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 466

AREA: 39.03 hectares

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

**Geological: Palaeontology :** Silurian - Devonian Chordata

**Biological: Birds:** Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding  
Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), breeding  
Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), breeding  
Seabird colony, breeding

## DESCRIPTION:

Sumburgh Head Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies on the southern most headland on the mainland of Shetland. The site follows the coastline east from the Small Geos of the Parks up to the Scult of Laward. The site consists of high cliffs of Old Red Sandstone, of up to 100 metres, and outlying stacks which provide an important breeding site for various seabirds. Sumburgh Head is nationally and internationally important for its breeding seabird colony, one of the largest in Britain. Geologically the site is noted for its nationally important specimens of vertebrates (of the order Chordata) dating from 440 – 350 million years ago (Silurian-Devonian).

Sumburgh Head is of national geological interest for vertebrate palaeontology as it contains the earliest known fish bed of the Middle Devonian Orcadian Basin. The fish bed holds a mixture of forms from the Middle and Upper Devonian period and is consequently an important site to compare the rocks and fish of other Devonian fossil beds in northern Europe. The fish bed lies within a small section of the cliff between the lighthouse and The Bairns and is the only known location for the fish *Asterolepis thule* which along with other closely related species is important for determining the age of rocks from this period.

The site is nationally important for its breeding seabird colony especially for its breeding guillemot, shag and puffin populations. The seabird colony also includes fulmar and kittiwake which occur in significant numbers along with a breeding colony of arctic terns.

## NOTIFICATION HISTORY

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 27 June 1984

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 19 October 2010

## REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 41.31 ha).

Most of Sumburgh Head SSSI is designated as part of Sumburgh Head Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

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