



Scottish Natural Heritage

**BASS ROCK
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 155

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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 and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

The Bass Rock is an island in the Firth of Forth formed from the remains of a volcanic plug. The Rock is 107m high with sheer cliffs dropping into the sea on three sides.

The main interest of the site is its huge gannet colony with at least 48 000 breeding pairs making it the second largest British and European gannetry and the largest single-rock gannetry in the world (the St Kilda colony is larger but spread over a number of islands and rocks). The colony supports about 22% of the UK population.

Gannet numbers have been increasing steadily throughout the 20th century, from 3000 pairs in 1904 to 21000 pairs in 1985 to 34000 pairs in 1994 and 48000 pairs in 2004. The gannets mainly nest on the top of the island above the cliffs and the availability of nesting sites seems likely to be the factor that will eventually limit the size of the colony. On the cliffs below the gannets, a variety of other seabird species nest, although none in such great numbers. However, there are regionally important populations of kittiwakes and guillemots and smaller numbers of fulmar, razorbills and shags.

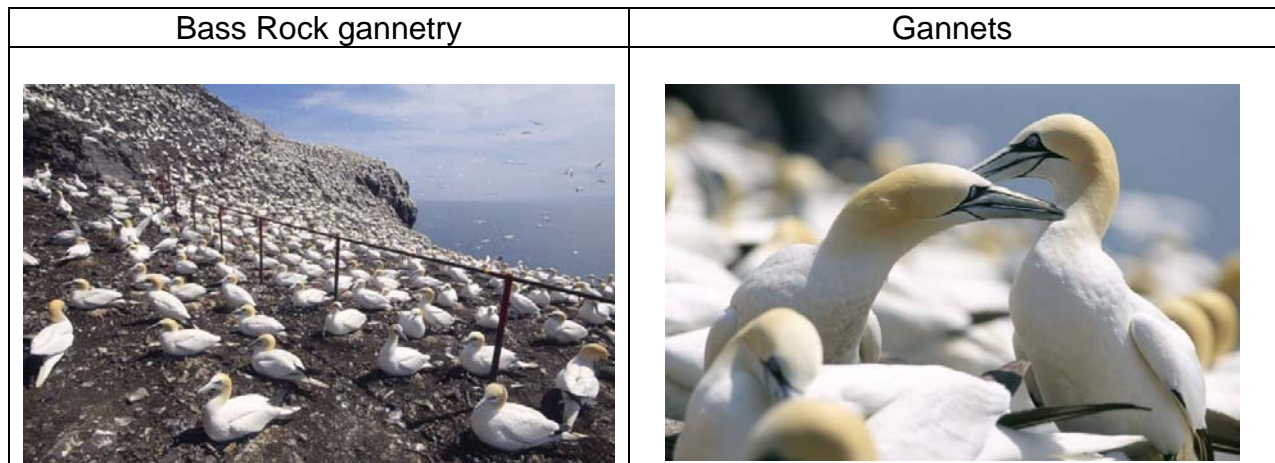
While not notified for its geological interest, the island is the remains of a volcanic plug, comprised of trachytic phonolite. The volcano was active in Calciferous Sandstone times (Lower Carboniferous, 360 to 310 million years ago).

Natural features of Bass Rock SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Northern gannet (<i>Morus bassanus</i>), breeding	Favourable (July 2004)	SPA

Seabird Colony, breeding	Favourable (June 2002)	SPA
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Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Arctic tern (<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>) ¹	Favourable (June 2003)	SPA
Common tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) ¹	Favourable (June 2003)	SPA
Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>) ¹	Favourable (June 2001)	SPA
Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>)	Favourable (June 2004)	SPA
Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>)	Favourable (June 2007)	SPA
Herring gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>)	Favourable (June 2001)	SPA
Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>)	Unfavourable (declining) (June 2007)	SPA
Lesser black-backed gull (<i>Larus fuscus</i>)	Favourable (June 2001)	SPA
Puffin (<i>Fratercula arctica</i>)	Favourable (April 2003)	SPA
Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>)	Favourable (June 2007)	SPA
Roseate tern (<i>Sterna dougalli</i>) ¹	Favourable (June 2003)	SPA
Sandwich tern (<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>) ¹	Unfavourable (declining) (June 2003)	SPA
Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>)	Unfavourable (recovering) (June 2001)	SPA
Breeding seabird assemblage	Unfavourable (declining) (July 2004)	SPA

¹ Does not breed on Bass Rock SSSI but breed elsewhere within the area of Forth Islands SPA.



Past and present management

The Bass Rock has a long history of use by man. Early records state that a Lindisfarne monk called Baldred stayed on the island for periods of retreat and meditation during the 8th century. The small chapel was built in 1491 and in 1546 was dedicated to St Baldred. A castle was built in 1405 and was used to hold political prisoners and also used as a garrison at various times. In 1671, a prison was built and was largely used to house covenanters in dreadful conditions until the 1690s and was demolished in

1701.

The island was used for sheep grazing up until at least 1870 and possibly later. In 1870, twenty-five sheep could be grazed on the grassy top of the rock. Gannets and their eggs were also harvested until at least 1870 with them being sold as “solan geese” and being considered a delicacy, as was “Bass mutton”.

Robert Stevenson built the Bass Rock lighthouse, which was opened in 1902. The lighthouse keepers maintained a vegetable garden on top of the island, the walls of which are still present. The lighthouse was automated in 1988.

No management now occurs on the island. Maintenance work is carried out on the lighthouse and its associated buildings. The Scottish Seabird Centre has a remotely operated camera which sends images to the Centre in North Berwick. The camera is powered by solar panels, which are placed on the lighthouse building roof. The only other visitors to the island are small groups of tourists and the occasional researcher.

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

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

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

1. Maintain the internationally important gannet colony along with the populations of other seabirds.

The gannet population is at least stable or possibly still increasing (next count is not due until 2014). Its numbers are likely to be limited in the future by the availability of nest sites. Other seabird populations vary between stable to declining. These declines, in kittiwake, guillemot and razorbill, are mirrored on other colonies and are likely to be due to off-site factors such as over-fishing and climate change.

2. Ensure that the colony is free from disturbance.

The inaccessibility of the island gives a degree of protection from human disturbance although, following the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, this may increase due to legal rights of access and these rights being exercised. Potential impacts of public access and management options are currently being looked at by SNH and other relevant parties including the land owner.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Due to the nature of gannetries, little or no management is required.

There is no management agreement but the owner is sympathetic to the natural heritage value of the site.

Date last reviewed: 31 March 2010