



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
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TRESHNISH ISLES

Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1562

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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.

This Statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Treshnish Isles SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable, maintained (June 2001)	
Maritime cliff	Favourable, recovered (June 2010)	
Seabird colony, breeding	Favourable maintained (June 2007)	
Greenland Barnacle goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>), non-breeding	Unfavourable, no change (March 2008)	Special Protection Area (SPA)
Grey seal (<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>)	Favourable, maintained (November 2003)	Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Storm petrel (<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>), breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 1996)	SPA
Reef	Favourable, maintained (August 2007)	SAC

Description of the site

The Treshnish Isles Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is an archipelago of remote, uninhabited, volcanic islands and skerries extending for a distance of 11 km. The archipelago is situated between the islands of Coll and Mull in the Inner Hebrides, with the northernmost islands lying 3 km west of Mull. The larger Treshnish islands are Cairn na Burgh Beg, Cairn na Burgh More, Fladda, Lunga and Bac Mòr (Dutchman's Cap), along with numerous other smaller islands, many characterised by low cliffs and steep rocky shores.

The islands support a wealth of wildlife and geomorphological interest, most notably coastal habitats, seabird colonies, wintering geese and a breeding seal colony.

The Treshnish Isles is nationally important for its geomorphological interest - an ice-moulded and till-covered shore platform which pre-dates the Devensian period. The platform is particularly striking on the island of Bac Mor. This feature was found to be in favourable condition when last monitored in June 2001. All targets were met, in particular the site was found to be intact and the extent, composition, visibility and access to the platform were all maintained.

The maritime cliff slope and cliff top habitat supports a wide diversity of maritime grassland, coastal heath and peatland plant communities, including species such as thrift, sea campion and common bird's-foot-trefoil. This feature demonstrates remarkable ecological contrast between the islands. It was last monitored in June 2010 and found to be in favourable, recovered condition, with all targets met. In 2003 the site failed the species composition target for the grassland dominated sward due to a lack of abundance of flowers, however when revisited in 2010 this community was found to have abundant forbs. Both site visits were carried out in early summer and therefore the difference cannot be explained by seasonal differences. In 2010 the site was found to have a large rabbit population which appear to be managing the sward well by preventing it becoming rank and allowing abundant flowering.

The Treshnish Isles support the largest breeding seabird colony in the Mull, Coll and Tiree area, including a population of storm petrels. Other breeding seabird species include manx shearwater, puffin, razorbill, guillemot, kittiwake, fulmar and shag. When last monitored in June 2007 the seabirds were found to be in favourable, maintained condition. The most recent counts indicate a total seabird population of 28,000 individuals, including the storm petrels and manx shearwaters, and represent an increase in the overall population from the baseline at the time of notification in 1986.

The Treshnish Isles also support an important population of wintering Greenland barnacle geese. The geese breed in Greenland and spend the winter months at various sites along the west coast of Scotland. The geese were last monitored in 2008 and the population was found to be in unfavourable, declining condition. The aerial count recorded 77 individuals (excluding Staffa), which represents a continuing decline since the 1980s. The reasons for the decline on Treshnish are not fully understood, but factors such as the cessation of grazing on the islands (leading to a reduction in the quality of grass for geese to feed on), as well as the establishment of goose management schemes on nearby islands such as Islay may be contributing.

The Treshnish Isles support the largest breeding colony of grey seals in the Mull, Coll and Tiree area, representing around 3% of the UK population of this species. The site

is also designated as an SAC for this feature. The low-lying rock platform and beach at the north end of Lunga and on Sgeir a'Chasteil are key breeding sites for the seals. The seal colony was last monitored in November 2003 and found to be in favourable, maintained condition. Pup production increased gradually until the mid-1990s and numbers have stabilised at around 1000 pups per year since then.

The Treshnish Isles qualify as an SPA, by supporting an internationally-important breeding population of storm petrel, representing 1% of the EC, and 3% of the British, breeding populations. They nest in rock crevices along the beaches and amongst the stone walls of abandoned village buildings. The population was last monitored in June 1996 and found to be in favourable maintained condition.

The Treshnish Isles is also designated as an SAC for the rocky reef habitat which surrounds the islands. This forms the habitat for a variety of biological communities such as those characterised by encrusting animals and attached seaweeds. This feature was assessed as favourable, maintained when last monitored in August 2007.

The islands are also important (but not notified) for other features of ecological interest, including being a study site for research into evolutionary divergence and island polymorphs in resident animal populations (e.g. house mouse on Lunga). The islands also support small numbers of corncrakes; and two nationally-scarce plants - thyme broomrape and oysterplant.



Past and present management

Although the islands have been uninhabited for at least the last 150 to 200 years (the Statistical Account of 1791-99 described the Treshnish Isles as “a cluster of small uninhabited isles”) there is evidence of cultivation, and at least temporary human settlement, over past centuries. The islands have numerous archaeological sites in the form of ruined fortifications and buildings, most notably the castles on the Cairn na Burghs which date from the early 13th century.

Historically, the larger islands have been used for grazing both sheep and cattle by graziers from nearby Mull, however grazing ceased completely around 1995, or even earlier than this on some islands. The main reasons for this seem to have been increased concern for animal welfare, and the cost and difficulty of managing stock on small, remote islands. Rabbits, however, graze the vegetation on Lunga, though it seems that they may be a relatively recent introduction to this site.

The principal activity on the islands now is as a destination for visitors, with several small local businesses running trips to the islands in the summer, principally landing on Lunga, but also occasionally on other islands too. Some autumn boat trips are also run to give visitors an opportunity to observe the seals. A number of people also arrive independently on yachts and canoes. An estimated 20,000 visitors now land annually, most only for day trips. Ecologists, ornithologists and archaeologists also visit regularly to monitor the birds, mammals, plants and sites of cultural interest. Some localised erosion is apparent, most notably around the landing site on Lunga, however current visitor impacts are not considered to be detrimental to the interests of the site.

The Hebridean Trust bought the entire island archipelago in 2000 with the aim that the wildlife, archaeology and amenity of the islands could be protected in perpetuity, contributing to the economic and social development of the Hebrides; and to promote awareness and understanding of the natural environment. A Management Plan has been prepared for the period 2001-2011 with priorities which include considering options for reintroducing grazing; promoting visitor management and raising awareness; monitoring, and if necessary controlling, species not naturally occurring on the islands (e.g. mink, rats); and encouraging research on the natural and cultural heritage.

The Treshnish Isles also form part of the Loch na Keal National Scenic Area.

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

We wish to work with the owners 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 and to monitor the effectiveness of the management plan.

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, where 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 geomorphological feature in favourable condition

Ensure that site continues to be intact, and that the extent, composition, visibility and access to the platform are all maintained.

2. Maintain the maritime cliff vegetation in favourable condition

Maintain vegetation with a diverse sward and abundant flowering plants, and ensure that any proposed changes in management, e.g. the reintroduction of grazing, fully considers the potential impacts of this on the vegetation communities of interest.

3. Maintain the populations of seabirds in favourable condition

Ensure that factors such as disturbance and changes in management do not adversely affect the breeding seabirds; continue to provide information and advice to visitors to promote appropriate behaviour and raise awareness of the natural heritage.

4. Promote appropriate management for wintering Greenland barnacle geese

Explore options for managing grasslands on the larger islands to promote swards of sufficient quantity and quality to provide attractive feeding sites for goose populations, to ensure that they continue to be spread across the full range of wintering sites in the Hebrides.

5. Maintain breeding populations of grey seals in favourable condition

Ensure that factors such as disturbance and changes in management do not adversely affect the breeding seals; continue to provide information and advice to visitors to promote appropriate behaviour and raise awareness of the natural heritage.

6. Maintain breeding populations of storm petrels in favourable condition

Ensure that factors such as disturbance and archaeological research do not adversely affect the breeding storm petrels; continue to provide information and advice to visitors to raise awareness of the natural heritage.

7. Maintain the reefs surrounding all the islands in favourable condition

Ensure that factors such as disturbance and changes in management do not adversely affect the reef areas; continue to provide information and advice to visitors to raise awareness of the natural heritage.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

As noted above, one of the factors which could be having a detrimental impact on the numbers of wintering Greenland barnacle geese visiting the Treshnish islands may be the positive habitat management schemes attracting geese to nearby inhabited islands such as Tiree, Coll and Islay.

Date last reviewed: 17 February 2011