CITATION

ULVA, DANNA AND THE MCCORMAIG ISLES
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Argyll and Bute

Site code: 1581

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NR 700799, NR 666753, NR 678758

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 55, 61, 62
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 358

AREA: 736.78 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological :

Intertidal marine habitats and saline lagoons	**: Mudflat**
	: Saline lagoon
	: Tidal rapids
Coastlands	**: Maritime cliff**
	: Saltmarsh
Lowland grassland	**: Lowland calcareous grassland**
Lowland heathland	**: Lowland dry heath**
	: Lowland wet heath
Vascular plants	**: Vascular plant assemblage**
Non-vascular plants	**: Bryophyte assemblage**
Birds	**: Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo), breeding**
	: Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis), breeding
	: Greenland barnacle goose (Branta leucopsis), non-breeding
	: Greenland white-fronted goose (Anser albifrons flavirostris), non-breeding
	: Whooper swan (Cygnus cygnus), non-breeding

DESCRIPTION

Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated on the Knapdale peninsula, approximately 15 km south-west of Lochgilphead. The SSSI encompasses the Ulva peninsula; including the coastal lagoons leading into the Linne Mhuirich in the north east and the head of Loch na Cille on the west coast; and also includes the islands of Danna, Liath Eilean, Sgeir Bun an Locha, Sgeir Dhonncha, Eilean Mor, Dubh Sgeir, Corr Eilean and Eilean Ghamhna, which lie in the entrance to Loch Sween.

The underlying geology of the site, comprised of bands of Tayvallich limestone, epidiorites, basaltic dykes, phyllites, and mica schists, together with the more acidic bands of quartzite and Crinan grits, has a significant influence on the plant communities and their distribution throughout the site. In addition, the distinctive topographical series of north-east/south-west orientated ridges and valleys provides an important range in maritime exposure and soil moisture conditions. The physical aspects of the landscape and the unique influence of the oceanic climate combine to produce an exceptionally diverse mosaic of habitat types and a subsequently high number of species of flora and fauna, which together make this one of the richest areas of conservation importance in the Argyll district.

Several areas of calcareous grassland occur within the mosaic of habitat types and reflect the distribution of underlying base-rich limestone. Plant diversity is high in these areas and typically supports species such as lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*. These grassland areas are also one of the best in the region for orchids, with several notable species such as frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, small-white orchid *Pseudorchis albida*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, greater- and lesser-butterfly orchids *Platanthera chlorantha and P. bifolia*, growing in these localities.

In patches of more acidic rock types, such as quartzite and quartz-mica schists, heath communities have developed. Where drainage has been impeded wet heath communities occur and these support characteristic species such as common heather *Calluna vulgaris*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and sphagnum moss species. In drier patches along ridges, dry heath communities with sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and mat-grass *Nardus stricta* occur, often in association with ancient juniper *Juniperus communis* scrub. The growth form and extent of juniper scrub in these areas is highly unusual in Argyll.

The SSSI includes several coastal areas where the vegetation is strongly influenced by the maritime conditions. Small rocky knolls around the coastline support salt tolerant grasses and herb species such as sea plantain *Plantago maritima*, buck's-horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*, thrift *Armeria maritima* and sea campion *Silene uniflora*. Towards the shore fringing saltmarsh communities occur along the edges of the sea lochs. These are principally comprised of upper saltmarsh, dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra*, saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardii* and sea milkwort *Glaux maritima*. Towards the shore the middle saltmarsh zone is typically dominated by saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*. Pioneer saltmarsh species such as common glasswort *Salicornia europaea* and annual sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* occur locally.

The distinctive coastal habitat complex within the SSSI supports an extremely rich diversity of vascular plants, with over 500 species recorded on site. Several of these are of national importance and the site has been notified for the assemblage of these plant species. Notable species include the nationally-scarce narrow-leaved eelgrass *Zostera angustifolium* and dwarf eelgrass *Zostera noltei* which occur within An Grianan bay. Further species of interest include the locally-rare lesser tussock sedge *Carex diandra*, maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*, juniper *Juniperus communis* and Scots lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*.

The site is also important for bryophytes with over 200 species having been recorded within the SSSI. Habitats which are particularly rich, include the outcrops of calcareous rocks, small areas of Atlantic woodland, coastal rocks and flushes. Within these habitats 10 nationally scarce species grow, primarily on the calcareous and coastal rocks, with the most important of these being *Porella obtusata*, *Riccia beyrichiana*, *Grimmia longirostris* and *Grimmia lisae*. Notable oceanic species *Marchesinia mackaii* and *Adelanthus decipiens* are present and the site also supports several locally important populations of *Eurhynchium crassinervium*, *Plagiochila britannica* and *Taxiphyllum wissgrillii*.

The site has a rich marine environment with intertidal communities of national importance. The unusual hydrographic conditions, including the small tidal range, result in a compressed intertidal zonation and give rise to communities of unusual species composition. The intertidal mudflats on the shores of Loch na Cille and enclosed brackish lagoon within An Grianan bay have rich eel grass communities supporting all three species of eel grass *Zostera marina*, *Z. angustifolia*, and *Z. noltei*. The rare alga *Codium fragile spp. tomentosoides* also occurs within Linne Mhuirich. The narrow channel at the entrance to Linne Mhuirich restricts tidal flow resulting in strong tidal streams. These rapids support outstanding sponge populations including encrusting *Hymeniacidon perleve* and

Halichondria bowerbanki as well as numerous other animals and plant species, several of which are more typically associated with deeper water. In terms of species richness the Linne Mhuirich rapids support the most diverse flora and fauna in the whole of Loch Sween.

The outer islands of the SSSI have particularly important seabird colonies and support the largest breeding populations of cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and shag *P. aristotelis* in the Mid Argyll district. The shags occupy both Corr Eilean and Eilean Ghamhna and breed on the cliff faces and on rocks just above the splash zone, while cormorants primarily nest on the larger Corr Eilean around the summit of the island.

The site also supports internationally-important wintering populations of the Greenland races of barnacle geese *Branta leucopsis* and white-fronted geese *Anser albifrons* spp. *flavirostris*. The barnacle geese utilise improved pastures on Danna Island as their core feeding zone, whilst the white-fronted geese range more widely, and utilise the saltmarsh communities to a greater extent. The offshore islands, notably Eilean Mor and Eilean Ghamhna, provide goose refuges and roosting sites. Over 1% of the British whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus* population also utilise An Grianan and Loch na Cille areas in the autumn before dispersing more widely.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1974 as Ulva Lagoons and Danna Island SSSI.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 12 March 1992 as Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI with a 22 ha net decrease in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 21 January 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 742.5 ha)

Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI overlaps a small part of West Tayvallich Peninsula SSSI, which is notified for its Dalradian geology.

Most of Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI is also part of the Tayvallich Juniper and Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is designated for the European habitats and species listed below.

Habitats	:	Juniper on heaths or calcareous grasslands
Species	:	Marsh fritillary butterfly (Euphydryas aurinia)
	:	Otter (Lutra lutra)

Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI is adjacent to Linne Mhuirich SSSI.