

CITATION

**WEST HALLADALE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**
Highland (Sutherland)

Site code: 1607

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC827505

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 10
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 448, 449

AREA: 8658.85 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological: **Bogs:** Blanket bog
Birds: Breeding bird assemblage
Black-throated diver *Gavia arctica*, breeding
Common scoter *Melanitta nigra*, breeding

DESCRIPTION

West Halladale Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in north Sutherland, 3km south of Melvich. The site is nationally important for blanket bog vegetation and the assemblage of upland breeding birds. The populations of black-throated diver and common scoter are each nationally important in their own right. Parts of the site are being restored to blanket bog from conifer plantation.

Blanket bog

West Halladale SSSI includes extensive areas of blanket bog which mainly lie between altitudes of 100 and 200 metres. The site forms the watershed between the Halladale and the Strathy rivers which flow to the north coast. Several types of blanket bog occur extensively on the site. The sloping ground supports valleyside mires, whilst the flat ground above the slopes supports watershed mires. Several of the pool systems contain areas of quaking mire which are nationally rare and frequently possess a high cover of bog moss *Sphagnum*. Among the species present are *Sphagnum fuscum* and the nationally scarce *S. pulchrum* and *S. austinii*, the latter being locally abundant. The bogs also support populations of cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idea* and the nationally scarce dwarf birch *Betula nana*.

Breeding bird assemblage

The extent and diversity of habitat, including 17 lochs and many smaller lochans and peaty pools, small burns and larger rivers, provide ideal conditions for a range of waders and waterbirds to nest and rear their chicks. A number of waders, including dunlin, golden plover and greenshank, have been recorded breeding on the site. Waterbirds are especially well represented with seven breeding species recorded including black-throated diver, common scoter and greylag goose. The drier ground and steep slopes provide nest sites for a range of other species including hen harrier and merlin. Golden eagle and peregrine also regularly hunt over the site.

/see overleaf

Black-throated diver and common scoter

The site provides suitable habitat for black-throated diver and common scoter, which breed here in nationally important numbers. More than 2% of the national population of black-throated divers breed on this site.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 27 September 1989

Notification confirmed on 19 June 1990 with a 102 ha reduction in area

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 17 December 2009

Extension notified under the 2004 Act: 25 August 2022 covering 116 ha

REMARKS

West Halladale SSSI is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below and is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the birds listed below.

Habitats : Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds
: Blanket bog
: Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
: Depressions on peat substrates
: Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface
: Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

Species : Marsh saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*)
: Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Birds : Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), breeding
: Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), breeding
: Dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), breeding
: Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), breeding
: Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), breeding
: Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), breeding
: Hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), breeding
: Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), breeding
: Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), breeding
: Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), breeding
: Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), breeding
: Wood sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), breeding