

## CITATION

**LOCH OF MEY**  
**SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**  
Highland (Caithness)

Site code: 1671

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: ND271735

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 12  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 451

AREA: 68.56 hectares

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

**Biological:** **Fens:** Transition grassland  
**Birds:** Breeding bird assemblage  
Greenland white-fronted goose  
*Anser albifrons flavirostris*, non-breeding

## DESCRIPTION

Loch of Mey Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located near the north coast of Caithness, 11km west of John O'Groats. The site is designated for the nationally important grassland habitat surrounding the loch, as well as the populations of breeding birds and wintering Greenland white-fronted goose.

### Transition grassland

The loch is bordered by species-rich fen and wet meadow vegetation that is seasonally flooded. This is one of the largest areas of this type of habitat in Caithness. The vegetation is dominated by species such as meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* and silverweed *Potentilla anserina*. Wetter areas have extensive patches dominated by marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* or bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*. The shallower areas of the loch have stands of common spike rush *Eleocharis palustris*. The nationally scarce narrow small-reed *Calamagrostis stricta* grows near the north end of the loch and there are large stands of yellow flag iris *Iris pseudacorus* near the northern and western margins.

### Breeding bird assemblage

This site is important for breeding birds, and it is at the northerly limit of the breeding distribution of some species. A particularly wide range of species breed around this loch when compared with other nearby lochs in Caithness. A wide variety of birds have nested at this site including gadwall *Anas strepera*, shoveler *A. clypeata*, little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, sedge warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, reed bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* and mute swan *Cygnus olor*. It is also an important area for breeding waders including redshank *Tringa totanus*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, curlew *Numenius arquata* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*.

### Greenland white-fronted goose

Loch of Mey is an important roosting site for wintering Greenland white-fronted goose which are present between late September and late April each year. The site

is used regularly by around half of the Caithness population of this species. Over 1% of the national population of Greenland white-fronted geese roost here, making it important for maintaining the distribution and range of this species within Caithness. The majority of Greenland white-fronted geese overwinter in the west of Scotland and Ireland, so the population that winters in Caithness is close to the northerly limit of the winter range for this species.

## **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1981 Act: 13 December 1996

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 21 October 2010

## **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected (from 68.5 ha).

Loch of Mey SSSI is part of the Caithness Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for the birds listed below.

Birds : Greenland white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*), non-breeding  
: Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), non-breeding  
: Whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), non-breeding