Scottish Natural Heritage

INNER CLYDE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1701

Caspian House
Clydebank Business Park
Clydebank
G81 2NR

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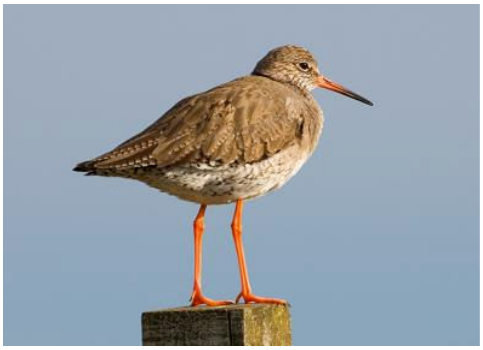
Purpose



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 Inner Clyde Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) principally encompasses the intertidal zone of the Clyde estuary from Clydebank in the east to a line between Helensburgh on the north shore and Greenock on the south shore. The seaward boundary of the site extends as far as Mean Low Water Springs. The site is important for its extensive saltmarsh habitats and as one of the most northerly of the large west coast estuaries used by migrating birds.

The large and diverse assemblage of wintering bird species includes the following species of national or international importance: cormorant, eider, goldeneye, oystercatcher, red-breasted merganser, red-throated diver and redshank. These birds depend on a corresponding variety of plants and invertebrates supported by the intertidal habitats. Gulls and wading birds, for example, subsist on the invertebrate fauna of the mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh, with redshank feeding largely on ragworms and curlew on sandhoppers. Meanwhile, many ducks such as the eider feed on molluscs such as mussels and cockles, while wigeon – along with mute and whooper swans – feed on the dwarf eelgrass and seaweed growing on the lower saltmarsh. On adjacent open waters are found fish-eating birds including cormorant, which feed on flatfish and eels, and red-breasted merganser and red-throated diver which feed mainly on sticklebacks.

Besides their important wintering population, redshank are known also to breed within the SSSI, at Newshot Island, although breeding redshank are not a notified natural feature of the SSSI.

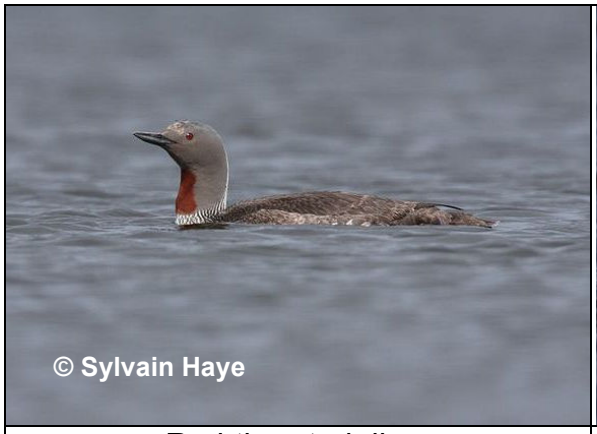
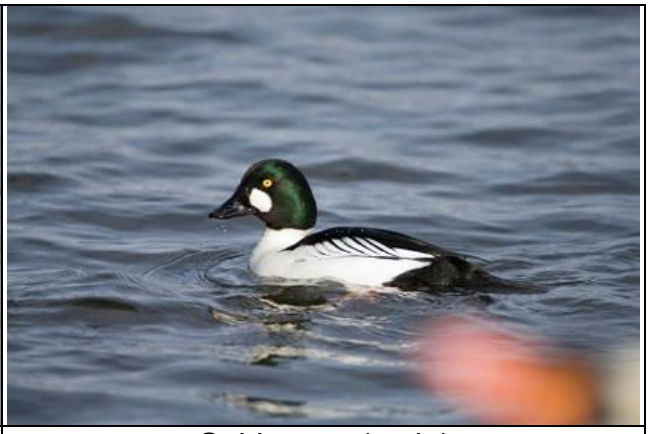
The condition of the wintering populations of each of the notified bird species has been assessed based on peak winter counts obtained using the Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) methodology. These indicate that all species have maintained more or less stable wintering populations, having maintained mean peak winter populations above an earlier minimum. A further species, scaup, formerly occurred within the site in nationally important numbers but have since declined substantially and are no longer considered part of the notified interests.

Towards the landward side the intertidal habitat grades into grassland dominated by red fescue and rushes, via a saltmarsh dominated by common saltmarsh grass. Within the landward section there are pockets of brackish water which support vegetation more commonly associated with swamps and are dominated by common reed and sea club rush. Further inland still there are wet grasslands dominated by tufted hair grass and Yorkshire fog.

The condition of the saltmarsh feature is considered to remain in a favourable condition, as it has suffered no evident loss of extent and continues to exhibit an appropriate diversity of structure and floristic composition.

Natural features of Inner Clyde SSSI	**Condition of feature (date monitored)**	**Other relevant designations**
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (August 2002)	
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (non-breeding)	Favourable, recovered (February 2007)	
Eider *Somateria mollissima* (non-breeding)	Favourable, maintained (February 2007)	
Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (non-breeding)	Favourable, maintained (February 2007)	
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (non-breeding)	Favourable, recovered (February 2007)	
Red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator* (non-breeding)	Favourable, maintained (February 2007)	
Red-throated diver *Gavia stellata* (non-breeding)	Favourable, maintained (February 2007)	
Redshank *Tringa totanus* (non-breeding)	Favourable, maintained (February 2007)	SPA / Ramsar

The site is also designated as Inner Clyde Special Protection Area (SPA) for redshank *Tringa tetanus* (non-breeding). The condition of the redshank has been assessed as favourable maintained as the mean peak winter populations have been maintained above an earlier minimum.

	
Red-throated diver	Goldeneye (male)

Past and present management

Approximately half of the land adjoining the site, along with areas of saltmarsh on the southern shore, is managed for agriculture (arable land and grazing pasture). Areas of foreshore and intertidal habitat at Dumbuck and Parklea are managed by the RSPB as a nature reserve.

Several areas adjacent to the site are used for recreation, with Brucehill playing fields and Levengrove Park at Dumbarton on the north shore, and Kelburn Park at Port Glasgow on the south shore. Public access to the foreshore is facilitated over much of the site by the existence of more or less formalised footpaths, notably including the coastal path running along the southern shore from Newark Castle to Parklea. Elsewhere, railway lines and roads abut much of the intertidal land within the SSSI.

Some areas close to the site on both north and south shores are subject to industrial and residential development, although in the past heavy industrial development was more widespread, with former oil terminals at Bowling and Mountblow for example.

To keep the river navigable, the central channel of the estuary is dredged to a depth of 10m at high tide and dredging spoil is dumped beyond the site boundary. The impact of current dredging practice on the site is unknown. Similarly, the potential impact of a cessation in dredging is not known with certainty, although it is possible that the retention of the sediment previously removed by dredging would result in a larger intertidal area within the site to the benefit of feeding waterfowl.

Inputs of organic pollution have declined markedly in recent years with the implementation of the EC Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and consequent addition and upgrading of sewage treatment facilities. Ironically, the cleaner water supports lower densities of many invertebrates that are the food source for wintering birds, and this may in part be responsible for the recent decline in the wintering population of scaup.

Cockle gathering, especially on Pillar Bank, has taken place for many years, as have bait digging and wildfowling. These activities are generally carried out informally and at low intensity and are not thought likely to have a significant direct impact on the birds for which the site is notified or their food source. There is, however, a minor risk of intermittent disturbance to feeding birds.

Anticipated long-term sea level rises associated with climate change are likely to have significant effects on the extent and distribution of intertidal and saltmarsh habitats, although the nature of these changes is uncertain. Saltmarsh may be lost as sea levels rise and landward migration is impeded by man-made sea defences; however, the magnitude of loss may be offset if saltmarsh can gain height through accumulation of sediment. Sedimentation inflows and dynamics, as well as human activities such as dredging, will likewise influence the changes in extent and distribution of intertidal sand and mudflats.

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

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers 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 management.

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. **To maintain the extent and condition of saltmarsh habitat** by ensuring protection from damaging impacts.

   The saltmarsh is susceptible to coastal squeeze in places whereby erosion at the seaward edge reduces the size of the saltmarsh as it is unable to migrate further inland by fixed protection structures. Changes in the grazing regimes may also allow undesirable species to dominate the marsh areas – for example cessation of grazing pressure can lead to rank grasses suppressing the botanical diversity of a site.

   The features of the site should also be safeguarded from tipping or other obstruction, such as the construction of pipelines, dumping of waste or coastal protection works. Any future coastal protection or flood prevention works would need to ensure there are no adverse impacts on the saltmarsh.

2. **To maintain the extent and forage value of intertidal sand and mudflats** by minimising or avoiding mechanical damage and harmful pollution.

   Removal of intertidal or subtidal sediments (as by dredging) may affect the availability of suitable foraging habitat for wildfowl, and should be avoided where possible. Organic pollution of intertidal areas has declined substantially in recent years with improved waste water treatment, although, ironically, the

reduced nutrient inputs have in some cases lowered the availability of the mud- and sand-dwelling invertebrates that some birds feed on. Inorganic pollution, too, is likely to have declined substantially with a reduction in heavy industry adjacent to the Clyde, fewer movements of large boats, and improved regulation.

3. **To maintain or increase the populations of wintering waterfowl and waders** by minimising disturbance from development or inappropriate recreational use of adjoining land.

It is important that any land management practices – existing and proposed – and any land use changes are carefully planned to avoid disturbance to wintering birds. SNH will assist land managers and others in planning existing or proposed land uses in a manner sensitive to the needs of the natural features.

Access to the site and adjoining land should follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) to ensure disturbance to the wintering birds is minimised.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Wintering populations of waterfowl may be influenced by miscellaneous factors affecting the birds while in passage or in breeding areas.

Informal bait and cockle collecting is a frequent occurrence, and may cause temporary and localised disturbance to roosting or feeding wildfowl. At current levels, this activity is unlikely to have an adverse effect on the distribution and abundance of important bird species.

Front page photograph: redshank *Tringa totanus*

Date last reviewed: 3 August 2010