



## 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

Ben Chonzie is an SSSI for its rare higher plants, its montane breeding bird interests and the extensive range of upland and montane habitats including tall-herb communities on cliffs, blanket bog, heaths and small wetlands. These habitats provide valuable feeding for breeding birds. The summit of Ben Chonzie lies approximately 13 km north-east of Crieff and 9km north of Comrie at the head of Glen Turret.



The rare higher plants and tall-herb communities occur primarily close to rock outcrops and on cliffs in upper Glen Turret. Some plant communities of special interest also occur in areas where the groundwater moves through, or over, the soil surface in what are called "flushes". This high level of botanical interest is largely due to the underlying Dalradian schist - a calcium-rich rock type typical of several Breadalbane mountains and which gives rise to highly fertile soils.

On the cliffs in upper Glen Turret, the wealth of calcium-loving plants includes alpine cinquefoil, mountain pansy, and twisted whitlow-grass, and well developed tall-herb communities on ledges with globe-flower, wood cranesbill, water avens, wild angelica, common valerian and meadowsweet. Amongst the mountain flora are local or rare species such as black alpine, hair and sheathed sedges, alpine sawwort, downy and mountain willows and Scottish asphodel. Where flushes are influenced by schistose rocks, species such as yellow saxifrage and the rare hairy stonecrop can be found. In places below the calcium-rich cliffs are grassland areas rich in plant species such as alpine lady's mantle and wild thyme. A single large colony of the rare mountain milk-vetch is present on an outcrop of acidic rock.

The site contains an exemplary assemblage of generally extensive upland and montane plant communities, typical of more acidic soils, which includes blanket bog with abundant cloudberry, grasslands, heaths and mossy heaths with *Rhacomitrium* moss close to the summit .

Also present within the site are colonies of several uncommon mosses.

The site supports a typical upland breeding bird community. Ptarmigan may be encountered on the higher montane heaths as may the upland breeding waders, dunlin and golden plover on blanket bogs and wet heaths rich in insect life. Cliffs and crags are frequented by ring ouzels and the extensive moorlands by red grouse and meadow pipit. Peregrine, short-eared owl, raven and golden eagle have bred on the site. Dotterel have been seen, but not recorded to nest, on Ben Chonzie.

Purple oxytropis	Ptarmigan
	

Natural features of Ben Chonzie SSSI
<b>Name of natural feature</b>
Upland Habitat Mosaic
Breeding bird assemblage
Vascular plant assemblage

**Current condition of the natural features**

Site condition monitoring (SCM) results in 2003 for the breeding bird assemblage on Ben Chonzie found the SSSI to be in favourable condition. A wide range of typical upland species breed on the site. The vascular plant assemblage was monitored in 2002 and was found to be in unfavourable condition. The majority of the rare and uncommon plants forming this assemblage are in poor condition with little regeneration and populations bordering on being unsustainable. As the dominant land use over a large part of the site, the level of grazing, both deer and sheep, appears to be implicated in this poor result. Tall herb ledges is the only aspect of the upland habitat mosaic which has been monitored recently (2004). This was found to be in favourable condition.

**Past and present management**

Sheep grazing and deer stalking are the major land-uses within the SSSI. Grazing levels, collectively by sheep, deer and blue hares, is moderate to high in different parts of the site. Conversion of heather moor to grassland with blaeberry is evident in some areas. The rare plant and tall herb interests are largely confined to areas where grazing pressure is locally reduced or absent, such as on steep cliff slopes and ledges.

Red grouse shooting takes place on parts of the hill and muirburn has recently been re-started in certain areas. A controlled programme of burning, that avoids steep ground, rocky outcrops and shallow soils and areas of deep peat/ blanket bog or where the vegetation is wind-clipped, may help maintain the diversity and structure of the heathland habitats.

Ben Chonzie is a popular Munro with hill walkers. Most walkers follow routes from Invergeldie in Glen Lednock or from the Loch Turret dam car park. Current levels of use are not known to be damaging the special interests of the SSSI but consideration of options for managing access routes from Loch Turret to the summit of Ben Chonzie during nesting periods may become necessary.

Two new native pinewoods were established on the lower, northern slopes in 1993. There is limited potential for further development of appropriate native woodlands on the lower slopes so long as the special interests of the site are maintained. The western slopes are important feeding territory for eagles and should be retained in their current, open state.

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

We wish to work with the land managers 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.

The long term goal for the site is to maintain, or where necessary restore, the long term viability of the upland and montane botanical and breeding bird interests of the SSSI.

#### **1. To maintain the extent and condition of the upland habitat mosaic by:**

- (1) Achieving a stocking density at which there is no obvious damage to the vegetation from grazing or trampling, and at which the SSSI is able to support a wide range of species.
- (2) Ensuring a good pattern of muirburn according to the Muirburn Code.

#### **2. To maintain the population and distribution of breeding birds**

#### **3. To maintain the population and distribution of rarer vascular plants.**

### **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

There are currently no other factors affecting the natural features of the site.

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Date last reviewed: 29 March 2007