

**CITATION****BEN WYVIS  
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST  
HIGHLAND (Easter Ross and Cromarty)**

Site Code: 195

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NH 470690

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 20  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 437

AREA: 5415.64 hectares

**NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES****Geological****Quaternary geology and geomorphology: Quaternary of Scotland****Biological****Bogs: Blanket Bog****Upland habitats: Upland assemblage****Freshwater habitats: Dystrophic and oligotrophic lochs****Vascular plants: Vascular plant assemblage****Birds: Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*****DESCRIPTION**

Ben Wyvis lies 10kms to the north west of Dingwall at the head of the Cromarty Firth and is the only major mountain massif in the North Eastern Highlands. Its size, altitude and location give it a unique ecological character midway between the continental Cairngorm massif to the south east and the oceanic mountains of the Western Highlands. Ben Wyvis is notified for both biological and geomorphological features.

The Ben Wyvis massif is outstanding for its periglacial landforms, including the best examples in Scotland of turf-banked and vegetated lobes and nonsorted circles and stripes. The turf-banked lobes are fossil features showing strong evidence of frost sorting and probably moved downslope under perma-frost conditions. The vegetated lobes relate to solifluction and are actively moving downslope. The site is also noted for blockfields, relict vegetated boulder lobes and active turf-banked terraces. This diverse assemblage of both active and relict features makes Ben Wyvis a key area for periglacial studies in Scotland.

Ben Wyvis supports a diverse mosaic of upland habitats including summit heath, lochs, high level springs and flushes and bryophyte-rich snowbeds. Montane and sub-montane dwarf-shrub heath is also well represented. Particularly impressive is the large extent of the summit heaths dominated by woolly fringe-moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii*.

The lower slopes support blanket bog habitats which are notable, especially on the southern side of the hill, for the amount of dwarf birch *Betula nana* and alpine bearberry *Arctous alpinus*.

The lochs, including those in the coires, are nutrient poor and characteristic of a montane glaciated landscape. Characteristic species such as awlwort *Subularia aquatica*, shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and quillwort *Isoetes lacustris* dominate in the clear, nutrient poor waters.

Ben Wyvis has a diverse upland plant assemblage supporting approximately 50 nationally scarce species including flowering plants, lichens and mosses. Nationally rare plants present include alpine foxtail *Alopecurus alpinus*, chestnut rush *Juncus castaneus* and the nationally scarce alpine saxifrage *Saxifraga nivalis*.

The extensive high altitude plateau supports a breeding population of dotterel.

## **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1974

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 16 May 1985.

Amended boundary: Minor changes to the boundary (both additions and deletions) were made prior to renotification under the 1981 Act.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25 March 2009

## **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected from 5471.95 ha.

5387.45 ha of Ben Wyvis SSSI is designated as the Ben Wyvis Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats listed below and land over 650m ASL is designated as the Ben Wyvis Special Protection Area (SPA) for the bird listed below.

Habitats:     Acidic scree  
                  Alpine and subalpine heaths  
                  Blanket bog  
                  Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels  
                  Dry heaths  
                  Montane acid grasslands  
                  Plants in crevices on acid rocks  
                  Tall herb communities

Birds:         Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*