

CITATION

AILSA CRAIG
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
South Ayrshire

Site code: 22

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NX 020998

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 76
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 317

AREA: 99.94 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Igneous Petrology: Tertiary Igneous
Biological: Birds: Gannet *Morus bassanus*
Biological: Birds: Seabird colony
Biological: Invertebrates: Beetles
Biological: Invertebrates: Flies

DESCRIPTION

The island of Ailsa Craig lies in the Firth of Clyde, 15km to the west of Girvan. It is nationally important for its geological interest as a plug of microgranite of Palaeogene age (formed between 58 and 60 million years ago), for its large colony of breeding seabirds including a nationally important population of gannets, and for its rare invertebrates.

Ailsa Craig is composed of a distinctive blue-grey alkali-microgranite, characterized by alkali pyroxene and amphibole minerals, particularly aegerine and arfvedsonite. Geochemically, the rock is peralkaline in character, and the site is important as rocks of this composition are relatively rare in the British Tertiary volcanic province.

The rocky shore and cliffs support a large colony (>10,000 pairs) of breeding seabirds including razorbill, guillemot, kittiwake, herring gull and lesser black-backed gull. The gannet colony is of particular importance as Ailsa Craig supports over 10% of the British gannet population.

The insect assemblage within the site includes the nationally rare blowfly (*Calliphora uralensis*) a species associated with the carrion derived from the islands breeding bird colonies. Ailsa Craig is believed to be the most southerly point in the range of this species. The island also supports the nationally scarce ground beetle (*Agonum gracilipe*) on the steep bare scree slopes to the east of the island.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1957

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 29 October 1984 with area of site slightly reduced to exclude lighthouse complex and a tenanted cottage. Boundary of site extends to Low Water Mark of Ordinary Spring Tides (LWMOST).

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25 July 2008

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 104.4 hectares)

Ailsa Craig SSSI is also designated as Ailsa Craig Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

Birds: Breeding seabird assemblage
Gannet *Morus bassanus*
Guillemot *Uria aalge*
Herring gull *Larus argentatus*
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*