



Scottish Natural Heritage
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CAIRNWELL
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 291

Address: Inverdee House, Baxter Street, Torry, Aberdeen AB11 9QA

Tel: 01224 266500

email: Grampian@snh.gov.uk

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

This site, situated between the Cairnwell summit and Carn nan Sac, is one of a series of Dalradian limestone outcrops in the district. The area is of outstanding importance for its high altitude sugar limestone grassland/heath vegetation, which is uncommon in Britain.

Above the outcrops shallow, sandy soils support patches of mountain avens-crowberry heath, calcareous grassland and a series of calcareous flushes. The vegetation surrounding the limestone area is mainly blaeberry-crowberry and heather-blaeberry heath.

The site supports a large number of rare flowering plants, including alpine milk-vetch, alpine sandwort, rock sedge, alpine pearlwort, alpine cinquefoil, least cinquefoil, spring sandwort, a rare eyebright and a rare lady's mantle. Blue moor-grass has also been recorded. Several rare species of moss and liverwort have been recorded on the site, on limestone rocks and in flushes.

The Cairnwell is an important area for fungi with a number of rare species. For example, a rare small fungus associated with dwarf willows, the mountain grisette (also known as the snow ringless amanita), was first described from the Cairnwell.

The Cairnwell forms part of the Cairngorms Massif SPA, designated for breeding golden eagles, which forage across the area.

Natural Features of Cairnwell SSSI	Feature Condition (date monitored)
Alpine calcareous grassland	Favourable Maintained (August 2008)
Vascular plant assemblage	Not yet formally assessed

Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) of the alpine calcareous grassland carried out in 2003 and most recently in 2008 found this to be in favourable condition, all targets being met. Surveys of the vascular plant assemblage carried out in 2004-5 recorded all the target species, though

concerns were expressed about the lack of flowers or seedlings of one species, least cinquefoil. An assessment of herbivore impacts on calcareous grasslands and flushes carried out in 2008 found low impacts on the grassland and higher impacts on the flushes, as indicated by continuing high levels of grazing on leaves and flower-heads.

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature Condition (date monitored)	Designations (SAC or SPA)
Golden eagle	Not yet assessed	SPA

Past and present management

The site used to be grazed by sheep during the summer months, from May until October, as a small part of an extensive grazing regime across surrounding hill ground. In 2001 all sheep grazing was removed. Grazing is now mainly from deer and mountain hare. Immediately adjacent to the site is an area in which around 350 hinds and calves overwinter.

The site is situated between two Munros, the Cairnwell itself and Carn a'Gheoidh, with a connecting path running through the site. The area is popular among hillwalkers and, in winter, cross-country skiers. The Glenshee downhill ski area is adjacent to the site on the north and west, but organised downhill skiing does not take place within the site.

The site is also used for educational purposes with groups from Kindrogan Field Centre visiting the area.

Objective for management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owner 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.

To maintain the diversity of habitats associated with the limestone outcrops and the flora and flora that these habitats support

The most valued components of the site occur on the outcrops. Their presence is determined by the chemical nature of the rock and the thinness of the soils combined with the affects of altitude. Many outcrops are not readily accessible to grazers, but some are. They do not need grazing to maintain them, and excessive grazing within accessible areas could lead to a reduction in flowering, reduction in species diversity or possibly erosion. However, sheep grazing has recently been removed and current levels of grazing by deer and hare do not appear to be damaging.

Access by walkers does not appear to be causing any significant disturbance to the site.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The Cairnwell is located within the catchments of the Rivers Dee and Tay. Any works to, for example, the path between the Munros, particularly in the vicinity of the Allt a Choire Dhirich, could impact downstream on the River Tay SAC. Cairnwell is also linked to the River Dee SAC via the Cairnwell Burn and Allt Loch Vrotachan. SNH would work with the estate to ensure that these SACs are not affected by any such works.

Date last reviewed: 2 June 2011.