

## CITATION

### CAPE WRATH SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Highland (Sutherland)

Site code: 311

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC 254726 and NC 326720

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 9  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 446

AREA: 1015.21 ha

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

**Biological:** Upland habitats: **Alpine heath**  
Coastlands: **Maritime cliff**  
Birds: **Seabird colony, breeding**  
**Guillemot *Uria aalge*, breeding**  
**Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, breeding**  
**Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, breeding**  
**Razorbill *Alca torda*, breeding**

## DESCRIPTION

Cape Wrath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in the northwest corner of mainland Scotland, 8km west of Durness, Sutherland. The site is in two parts. The site is designated for the nationally important alpine heath and maritime cliff vegetation and the populations of seabirds that breed on the cliffs.

### Alpine heath

This site has one of the best examples in Britain of alpine heath growing at low altitude. Plants that are normally found only on mountain tops grow as low as 250m on this site due to the combination of exposure to wind and the northern location of Cape Wrath. The largest area of these alpine heath communities is found on the steep slopes and the plateau of Sgribhis-bheinn. The vegetation here is a mix of dwarf shrubs including heather *Calluna vulgaris*, juniper *Juniperus communis* ssp. *nana*, bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and the nationally scarce alpine bearberry *A. alpinus*. On the most exposed ground this community gives way to heather and juniper heath, with alpine species such as alpine clubmoss *Diphasiastrum alpinum* and least willow *Salix herbacea* and trailing azalea *Loiseleuria procumbens*. On the exposed gravelly summit there are fine examples of woolly hair moss *Racomitrium* heaths. The nationally scarce hair sedge *Carex capillaris* can also be found here.

### Maritime cliff (vegetation)

The cliffs of Cape Wrath support a diverse range of coastal habitats. Tall herbs, ferns and heather grow on the cliff ledges. Notable species include roseroot *Sedum rosea*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and Scots lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*. Maritime heaths extend inland from the cliff edges. These areas are dominated by wind-clipped heather and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, with a variety of other plants including wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, spring squill *Scilla verna* and common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*. The maritime grassland is dominated by red fescue *Festuca*

*rubra*, sea plantain *Plantago maritima* and buck's-horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*. Two unusual species of eyebright *Euphrasia marshallii* (found only in Scotland) and the nationally scarce *E. foulaensis* also grow in the maritime grassland.

### **Seabird colony**

The Torridonian sandstone cliffs of Clò Mór support an immense breeding colony of seabirds of over 50,000 birds. There are large colonies of kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, guillemot *Uria aalge*, razorbill *Alca torda* and fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. Smaller colonies of black guillemot *Cepphus grylle*, shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, great black-backed gull *Larus marinus* and herring gull *L. argentatus* also nest on the cliffs. A substantial colony of puffin *Fratercula arctica* nests in burrows at the cliff tops.

### **Guillemot, kittiwake, puffin and razorbill**

More than 1% of the British breeding population of puffin, more than 2% of both kittiwake and razorbill and more than 3% of guillemot breed on the cliffs of Cape Wrath. These numbers make all four species of national importance in their own right at this site.

### **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1949 Act as part of Cape Wrath – Aodann Mhor SSSI: 1974

Re-notified under the 1981 Act as Cape Wrath SSSI: 21 February 1990 with a 2911ha decrease in area

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 11 November 2010

### **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected (from 1014 ha).

Cape Wrath SSSI overlaps with Cape Wrath Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is designated for the European habitat listed below and is part of the Cape Wrath Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the birds listed below.

Habitat : Vegetated sea cliffs

Birds : Seabird assemblage, breeding  
: Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, breeding  
: Guillemot *Uria aalge*, breeding  
: Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, breeding  
: Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, breeding  
: Razorbill *Alca torda*, breeding