



Scottish Natural Heritage

CASTLE LOCH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Carmont House
The Crichton
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Site code: 343

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.

Natural features of Castle Loch SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	
Greylag goose <i>Anser anser</i>	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	
Pink-footed goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SPA

Description of the site

Castle Loch Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies on the southern edge of the town of Lochmaben. The site regularly supports large numbers of wintering pink-footed geese and goosander. Wintering greylag geese also occur but the number of birds has declined below the nationally important threshold. The site also supports a good assemblage of other wintering and breeding birds, including shelduck, mallard, sedge warbler, reed warbler, willow tit and great-crested grebes. The nationally scarce cowbane, and the uncommon needle spike-rush occur on the site. Other locally uncommon plants include marsh stitchwort and lesser bulrush which are at the northern edge of their range in the British Isles and whorled caraway which is on the eastern edge of its range. Insects have not been thoroughly recorded but the current list includes the rare variable damselfly, the ringlet and small copper butterflies and the dingy shell moth. A variety of habitats are present including open water, emergent freshwater vegetation, birch and alder carr woodland, acidic and marshy grassland, and plantation woodland. This transition from open water through to woodland is an important component of the site.

The SSSI coincides with the boundary of the Castle Loch, Lochmaben Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the wintering population of Icelandic pink footed geese.

Past and present management

The site has historically been used by local people for angling and wildfowling. Until improvements to the sewerage system were undertaken in 1990, the loch received sewage from Lochmaben. This site is managed as a Local Nature Reserve with visitor information boards, boardwalks and a birdwatching hide. Coarse angling, sailing and wildfowling occur on the loch. At present all shooting is carried out from boats. Although the Local Nature Reserve designation has lapsed, recreational and management activities are agreed through a management committee of landowners, statutory, community and voluntary representatives which meet on a regular basis.

A Natural Care Management Agreement over 10.68ha of the SSSI is in place which supports maintenance of lochside vegetation, mainly reed with willow, birch and alder carr, wintering wildfowl and the assemblage of breeding birds.

Other land management activities include recreational access, woodland management, and maintenance of the archaeological and historical interest of the Lochmaben Castle and Scheduled Ancient Monument.

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

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers 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 and monitor the effectiveness of the Management Agreement.

The Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the Directive. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI / SPA must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

1. To maintain the habitats of the pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) greylag goose (*Anser anser*) and goosander (*Mergus merganser*).

To maintain low levels of, or avoid significant disturbance to, the qualifying species of the SPA and SSSI, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained; and to ensure the populations of pink-footed goose, greylag goose and goosander are maintained in the long term.

2. To maintain variable water levels.

High water levels during the winter encourage the use of the area by waterfowl. Stable levels during the nesting season benefit breeding birds, and grassland management. Maintain typical annual fluctuation of water levels, with periods of high water to provide optimal conditions for over wintering wildfowl, stable levels in

spring and early summer to prevent nests being flooded, and low levels in mid summer to allow for the survival of plants and animals dependent on the seasonal lowering in water levels.

3. To maintain water quality.

The water within the site is currently rich in nutrients. This tends to favour more vigorous but less interesting plants and blue green algae, and could also affect the oxygen levels in the water. Ensure healthy populations of the key plants and animals found on the site by maintaining existing habitat diversity and quality. Maintain water quality to prevent loss of plants and invertebrates through review and minimising of nutrient inputs from existing discharges to the loch.

4. To maintain the diversity of invertebrates and plant interest.

The diversity of invertebrates and plant interest especially of the rarer species, summer grazing on the rough grassland, which prevents succession to coarser vegetation and scrub should be encouraged.

5. To avoid significant disturbance.

Current activities include sailing, winter wildfowling and fishing. Work is underway to integrate the various recreational uses with the agreed nature conservation objectives. Ensure disturbance to breeding and wintering bird interest does not increase beyond current levels by continuing liaison between the various user groups and providing recreational activities that are fully integrated with the site's interest.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Despite an increase in the wintering population of pink-footed geese in the UK, changes in the winter distribution and timing of migration of pink-footed geese are significant factors in the number of birds now using the site. The lower populations using the area reflect these changes with more birds now wintering in Norfolk and Lancashire than previously.

A management plan for the site is currently being prepared by Dumfries and Galloway Council to underpin proposals to re-establish the Local Nature Reserve (LNR) for Castle Loch and the adjacent but not designated Hightae Loch.

The presence of the invasive species fringed water lily (*Nymphoides peltata*) in Mill Loch which drains to Castle Loch, poses a threat to the integrity of the site and the notified features. Management works to control and attempt to eradicate this species from Mill Loch are continuing and preventing spread to Castle Loch remains a priority.

Expansion of the town on the north east and north west sides of the loch are of concern in maintaining the SPA interest for roosting pink-footed geese.

Date last reviewed: 18 December 2008