



## 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.

<b>Natural features of Claonaig Wood SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>
Upland Oak Woodland	Unfavourable, declining (10 December 1999)

## Description of the site

Claonaig Wood site of special scientific interest (SSSI) lies in the north east corner of the Kintyre peninsula, 13 km south of Tarbert. Most of the site is covered by ancient, semi-natural woodland and the SSSI is designated for this natural feature. The woodland is set above a broad band of raised beach and rocky shore and is crossed by a number of small streams. Most of these empty into the raised beach, rather than draining directly into the sea, and this has produced a mosaic of wet heath and acid grassland. The Allt a'Bhuic Burn has eroded a deep and steep-sided rocky ravine that bisects the site. The SSSI supports a diverse range of ferns, bryophytes and lichens, which include a number of important oceanic species and communities.

The woodland is dominated by oak and birch on acid soils. Other tree species, such as hazel, rowan, alder and willow, are also present, but are much less frequent. The ground is generally gently sloping and includes a number of wet hollows. Woodland is densest around the Alt a' Bhuic Gorge and this area supports a typical woodland ground flora, with characteristic species like bluebell and wood sorrel, and also a profusion of lemon-scented fern. To the north of the site the tree cover gradually decreases, and at the northern boundary there are large open areas, some dominated by bracken and other wetter patches occupied by wet heath. At the southern end of the SSSI the woodland grades into semi-natural acid grassland beneath a cover of scattered birch and occasional oak.

Within Claonaig Wood there are three main woodland communities, each with its own characteristic set of plant species. The communities are classified under the National

Vegetation Classification according to these characteristic species, as follows:

- **W4** downy birch - purple moor - grass
- **W11** sessile oak - downy birch - wood sorrel
- **W17** sessile oak - downy birch - greater fork-moss

This diversity of woodland types is mainly due to variations in soil moisture within the site. Claonaig Wood is significant within Kintyre because it contains the second largest area of W17 woodland, as well as important areas of W4 and W11 woodland.

The condition of the notified natural feature of Claonaig Wood SSSI was monitored on 10 December 1999. Overall, the feature was found to be in **unfavourable and declining** condition. The monitoring found the wood had a uniform age structure and that there was insufficient regeneration occurring. It found excessive bracken cover and evidence of heavy browsing, both of which are likely to be limiting regeneration. A lack of deadwood was also reported.

[title]	[title]
Photo	Photo

### **Past and present management**

The SSSI is divided into two management units by a fence which roughly follows the line of the Allt a' Bhuic Burn.

The southern section is part of Escart Farm. It is currently used for year-round sheep and cattle grazing by the tenant farmer and has been grazed for many years. The woodland is one of the few areas of winter shelter on the tenanted farmstead.

The northern section of the SSSI forms part of Claonaig Estate. In the past it was grazed by sheep and cattle, but since 1999 stock have been excluded as part of a management agreement with SNH. Around 10 years ago large areas of bracken were controlled with herbicide. More recently, in 2002, pigs were used to try and break-up the bracken cover. A small number of young oaks, raised from acorns collected on site, have been planted out (tubed and staked) with reasonable success. Bracken control using herbicide will re-commence during 2008.

### **Objectives 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 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.

SNH has two main objectives for the management of Claonaig Wood:

- 1. To maintain the extent of upland oak woodland.**
- 2. To increase the diversity of age classes of tree present in the wood.**

Currently, neither of these objectives are being met. This is because tree regeneration

is being limited by intense grazing and, in some areas, a thick cover of bracken that prevents light from reaching the ground layer. Regeneration could be increased by:

- Reducing the grazing pressure from stock in the southern section of the site.
- Undertaking bracken control.
- Reducing the number of deer browsing on the site.