



Scottish Natural Heritage

**CRAIGELLACHIE**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

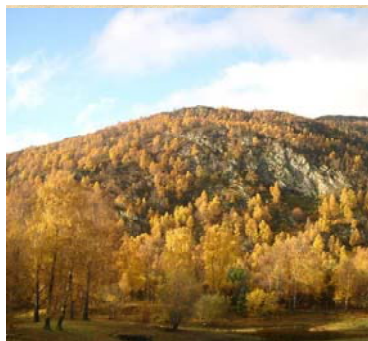
**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 428

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA**  
**Achantoul**  
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**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**

Craigellachie Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated immediately west of Aviemore, and is a craggy outcrop on the eastern side of the Monadhliath mountains. The site rises from an altitude of 225m adjacent to the A9 road, to 535m at Creag na h-lolaire. The site is notified as an SSSI because it is one of the largest and most important birchwoods remaining in Strathspey and for the important populations of rare northern moths which it supports.

The woodlands consist mainly of silver birch, with a scattering of other native species including downy birch, aspen, hazel, sessile oak, wych elm, bird cherry, and juniper. The woodland is patchy and variable and is interspersed with flushes, mires, small lochs, cliffs, scree, heath and grassland which add diversity to the site. There is evidence (including an ancient oak dredged from Loch Puladdern and the presence today of various plants and mosses) that these woodlands were once a mixture of birch and oak.

The woods at Craigellachie are a long recognised site for the scarce and spectacular Kentish Glory moth. Other local northern moth species which are dependant on birch as a larval food plant include the Rannoch sprawler, angle striped sawfly, scarce prominent and great brocade. The larval stage of the great brocade is also dependant on bog myrtle and willow species. Other species include netted mountain moth, which is found on the heath above the woodland, and feeds on bearberry.

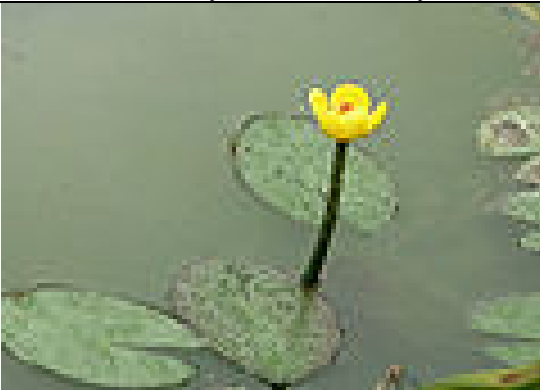

Other invertebrates recorded at Craigellachie include at least 10 Red Data Book species of insect and three species of beetles, many of which are indicators of ancient woodland and often associated with dead and decaying wood.

Over 155 species of vascular plants have been recorded, with species of national importance including the least yellow water-lily and such local species as Intermediate wintergreen. Richer grasslands with alpine bistort and common rockrose occur within the wood and there is a soligenous mire (rain and slope runoff fed) with bog myrtle and *Sphagnum* species. Juniper is widespread on the southern part of the site. The moorland around Craigellachie and Creag na h-Iolaire is dominated by ling heather, with strong natural regeneration of birch close to the woodland. Plant species of local distribution found here includes oblong-leaved sundew.

The intimate mosaic of habitats present within Craigellachie supports a diverse variety of bird species. Over forty species have bred within the site, including several notable species. The cliff nesting peregrines are of great interest, as they are consistently one of the most productive pairs in the region. More common species, characteristic of the birch woodland, include black grouse, buzzard, woodcock, tree pipit and occasionally wood warbler and pied flycatcher.

The upland birch woodland was monitored in 2009 and was found to be in favourable condition, with considerable regeneration of birch in parts of the site and a good diversity of other native tree species present.

The moths feature was monitored in 2004 and although not all of the important moth species were located, the upland birch woodland habitat was considered to be in good condition for supporting the named moth species. The feature is therefore considered to be in favourable condition.

Least yellow water-lily	Kentish glory moth
 A photograph of a single bright yellow flower of a least yellow water-lily (Najas flexilis) growing from a dark stem in a pond. The flower is surrounded by several large, round, green lily pads floating on the water's surface.	 A photograph of a Kentish glory moth (Gonimobas phaeon) resting on a brown, textured surface. The moth has a brown and white patterned body and wings, with a prominent white stripe running down the center of its back.

<b>Natural features of Craigellachie SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>
Upland birch woodland	Favourable - maintained (July 2009)
Moth assemblage	Favourable - maintained (September 2004)

### **Past and present management**

Old photographs from the early 1900s show the woodland to be much more open and with smaller trees than at present. In the past cattle and sheep have grazed Craigellachie and this has influenced the structure and composition of the wood, giving rise to the mature, even aged, open canopy dominated by birch which is present today. Old maps (Ordnance Survey First Edition 1843 – 1882) show that small parts of the lower slopes were, at one time, enclosed fields.

Cattle were removed from much of the site in 1960 and sheep were removed in 1982. Sheep were removed from the rest of the site in 1999. Grazing by domestic stock had been a major contributor to the lack of natural regeneration of native tree species on the SSSI.

Both red and roe deer are present on the SSSI and deer numbers fluctuate, particularly during periods of poor weather which often brings red deer down off the hill into the woodlands. Deer stalking has long been practised, both for sport and to control deer numbers. Deer have been excluded from part of the site under a Woodland Grant Scheme (1999 – 2009) to encourage natural regeneration.

Some areas of moorland within the site continue to be managed as grouse moor.

The old reservoir was built in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to provide a water supply for the new railway junction, hotel and houses in Aviemore. The reservoir is no longer used as a source of potable water and was replaced in 1962 by an underground storage tank fed by water from Loch Einich. Scottish Water retains a right of servitude over the SSSI for maintenance of the tank and associated pipelines. The quarry near Lynwilg provided a source of rock for the construction of the “new” A9.

In 1960, part of the SSSI (260 ha) was declared a National Nature Reserve and this is now managed by SNH under lease agreement with the owner. The purpose of the NNR is to retain and enhance the birchwood, encourage natural regeneration of native species of trees and provide opportunities for public enjoyment and learning. There is a network of waymarked trails on the SSSI including a low level all abilities trail around Loch Puladdern, a spectacular viewpoint on the higher slopes and associated interpretation. Public access and use of this area is encouraged and further improvements are being sought.

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

We **wish** to work with the owners 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.

- 1. To maintain the extent and condition of the native woodland habitats through, for example, managing grazing levels.**
- 2. To ensure that the habitat mosaics within the woodland area are suitable for the maintenance of the important moth populations.**

**Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

Management of part of the site as a National Nature Reserve aims to encourage opportunities for public enjoyment, learning and involvement associated with its natural heritage.

The steep wooded slopes of Craigellachie are a stunning landscape setting for Aviemore and are an important asset to the adjacent Aviemore resort and the Cairngorms National Park. There is considerable potential to further promote the site to visitors.

Date last reviewed: 17 November 2009