



Scottish Natural Heritage

All of nature for all of Scotland

CRAIGHALL GORGE
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 432

Battleby,
Redgorton,
Perth
PH1 3EW

Tel: 01738 444177

Email:
Tayside_clackmannanshire
@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



Craighall Gorge SSSI consists of a deep and dramatic wooded gorge (between 80 and 200 metres above sea level) running north-south which was created by the River Ericht incising into the Old Red Sandstone rocks. Nearly all of the woodland in the Gorge is considered to be of ancient semi-natural origin, and is shown on maps from 1750 and 1860. Given the steep and dangerous nature of much of the Gorge, it is highly likely that the history of continuous woodland cover extends back to the last ice age – there are also many plants which indicate this. There are several different types of woodland communities in the Gorge, but ash and oak woodlands are the most frequent.

The site was notified as an SSSI for its upland mixed ash woodland (which is of European importance), vascular plants and lichens (many of which are very rare). Most of the SSSI is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes.

The site supports a number of rare plants as well as rare species of lichen and bryophytes. Of particular note are whorled Solomon's seal, a woodland plant only found in Perthshire in the UK; sticky catchfly, a rare species found on cliffs; two extremely rare lichens found on rocks by the River Ericht, one of which is found nowhere else in the UK, and the other is, unusually, semi-aquatic.

Although not notified features for the site, peregrine falcons regularly nest in the gorge, and a number of unusual beetles occur which are found in dead and decaying wood. The River Ericht is part of the River Tay SAC which is designated for salmon, lampreys (brook, sea, and river), otters and clearwater lochs.

Part of the Gorge is within the Craighall Rattray Garden and Designed Landscape.

Ear-lobed dog-lichen	Craighall Gorge
	

Current condition of the natural features

Upland mixed ash woodland

Unfavourable – recovering. The site is deemed to be recovering as there has been a recent attempt to reduce the amount of non-native species throughout the site. However there is still a non-native component to the woodland.

Lichen assemblage

Unfavourable – no change, due to the presence of Rhododendron, beech, sycamore and conifer regeneration, and out-shading of the lichen species by these species.

Vascular plant assemblage

Favourable - maintained

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Craighall Gorge SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland mixed ash woodland	Unfavourable, recovering (August 2004)	SAC
Lichen assemblage	Unfavourable, no change (March 2010)	
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable, maintained (September 2001)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features ¹	Feature condition (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Atlantic salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>	Favourable, maintained (October 2004)	SAC
Brook lamprey <i>Lampetra planeri</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
River lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
Sea lamprey <i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Favourable, maintained (April 2004)	SAC

¹ The River Tay SAC is also designated for its clear water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels. However this feature is not present within Craighall Gorge SSSI.

Past and present management

Much of the woodland near the castle and immediately on the opposite side of the river has been treated as policy woodland within the Garden and Designed Landscape, and there are some conifers in these areas. Historically the oak has been preferentially managed, to the detriment of ash and elm in particular. It is thought that in the 18th century much of the woodland surrounding the Gorge was coppiced commercially - especially ash and hazel, with oak being introduced for tannin production in 1800.

The old A93 Blairgowrie to Braemar road runs through the western edge of the site. This portion of the road was bypassed recently and is now only used by walkers and cyclists.

Salmon fishing is let out on part of the River Ericht, part of the River Tay SAC. There is some pheasant shooting within the Craighall Estate section.

Invasion by rhododendron appears to be occurring on the site. Some conifer, beech and sycamore regeneration occurs. Felling of mature conifers and other non-native trees also takes place. Craighall Gorge was the subject of a LIFE III Woodland project co-ordinated by Highland Birchwoods. The project aimed to develop conservation management to benefit the gorge woodland communities, through the use of positive management works in the site, including non-native species removal. Dutch elm disease has killed most of the larger elms. There is little tree and shrub regeneration on the less steep ground; thought to be due primarily to roe and fallow deer, and rabbits (which occur in high numbers on the woodland margins). In much of the area this is not of very great concern because of relatively recent pulses of regeneration, however this has not occurred in the oak dominated areas.

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

The main objective for management at Craighall Gorge is:

- ❖ **to maintain, and where possible extend, the area of upland mixed ash woodland habitat and the populations of rare lichens and vascular plants, by:**
 - Continuing to control regeneration of non-native trees and shrubs (especially rhododendron, beech and sycamore) outwith areas essential for maintaining the Garden and Designed Landscape.
 - Removing rhododendron and other non-native tree and shrub species which threaten the notified lichen interest – rare species in specific locations are being threatened by being 'shaded out' by dense shade creating species like rhododendron; more generally lichens benefit from more open woodland with small clearings.
 - taking care to avoid inadvertent damage to habitats and species through other activities, eg silvicultural management or path creation and maintenance.

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, its natural features and the effectiveness of management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the 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 these Directives. The objectives above 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 must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

None known

Date last reviewed: 5 November 2010