

## CITATION

### DUNBEATH PEATLANDS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Highland (Caithness)

Site code: 560

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: ND 040340

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 11  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 444, 449, 450

AREA: 6431.81 hectares

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological	:	Bogs	:	Blanket bog
	:	Birds	:	Breeding bird assemblage
			:	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i> , breeding
			:	Golden plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> , breeding
			:	Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i> , breeding

## DESCRIPTION

Dunbeath Peatlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is an extensive area of blanket bog in central Caithness, 7km west of Dunbeath. The site is nationally important for its peatland habitats and the assemblage of breeding birds. Of the breeding bird species, dunlin, golden plover and greenshank are nationally important in their own right, given the high densities of these species that breed on this site.

### Blanket bog

Blanket bog covers most of the site which lies between 150m and 300m in altitude. The rounded hill tops, gentle gradients and relatively uniform geology support a peatland with a generally uniform structure and species composition. Valleyside mires (which occur on sloping ground) and watershed mires (found on the flat ground above the slopes) merge into one another, forming an extensive tract of peatland. Saddle mires are also found in the depressions between some of the summits. Deer grass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, heather *Calluna vulgaris* and hare's tail cotton grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* are the dominant species over much of the area, with variable amounts of cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and common cotton grass *E. angustifolium*. There are extensive carpets of bog moss *Sphagnum spp.*, and in several places, but particularly in the vicinity of pool systems, these include species sensitive to disturbance. The most notable species are *S. fuscum* and the nationally scarce *S. austinii*. In some of the drier areas *Cladonia* lichens are abundant.

The peatland to the east of Loch Braigh na h-Aibhne has widely spaced, fairly large, rounded pools, extensive *S. magellanicum* carpets and frequent *S. fuscum* hummocks. This area also supports the nationally scarce small cranberry *Vaccinium microcarpum*. On other parts of the site, the peatland has linear pools separated by wide ridges, supporting distinctive tussocks of hare's tail cotton grass. Somewhat unusually, this site also has erosion features of particular interest. The slopes of Cnoc na Stoirm Mor to the north west of Loch Mhadadh show evidence of 'bog-bursts' where a large peat mass has slid downhill and subsequently revegetated.

/see overleaf

### **Breeding bird assemblage**

This extensive area of moorland with its many lochs, streams, bog pools and mosaic of vegetation types supports a wide range of upland bird species. Notable species include red-throated diver, black-throated diver, arctic skua, hen harrier, common scoter, merlin and golden eagle. Other breeding birds include wigeon, red grouse, raven, teal, buzzard, snipe, curlew, common sandpiper and dipper as well as the waders described below.

### **Dunlin, golden plover and greenshank**

The site provides suitable habitat for wading birds that breed in upland areas. Greenshank, golden plover and dunlin have all been recorded breeding on this site at densities well above average for the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland.

### **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1981 Act: 9 November 1995

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 23 September 2010

### **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected (from 6431 ha).

Dunbeath Peatlands SSSI is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below and is also part of Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the birds listed below.

- Habitats :
- : Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds
  - : Blanket bog
  - : Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
  - : Depressions on peat substrates
  - : Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface
  - : Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath
- Species :
- : Marsh saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirculus*)
  - : Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- Birds :
- : Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), breeding
  - : Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), breeding
  - : Dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), breeding
  - : Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), breeding
  - : Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), breeding
  - : Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), breeding
  - : Hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), breeding
  - : Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), breeding
  - : Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), breeding
  - : Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), breeding
  - : Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), breeding
  - : Wood sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), breeding