

## CITATION

**DUNNET HEAD**  
**SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**  
Highland (Caithness)

Site code: 571

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: ND 216750 to ND 206712

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 12  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 451

AREA: 93.05 hectares

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

**Biological Coastlands: Maritime cliff**  
**Birds: Seabird colony, breeding**  
**Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding**

## DESCRIPTION

Dunnet Head Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the north coast of Caithness about 10km east of Thurso. The site is designated for the nationally important coastal vegetation and breeding seabirds.

### **Maritime cliff (vegetation)**

Maritime cliff vegetation grows in a narrow strip along the cliff tops and on some of the cliff ledges. Species-rich maritime heath grows in a mosaic with maritime grassland on the cliff tops. Key species of the maritime heath are heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, creeping willow *Salix repens* and bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Typical maritime grassland species include red fescue *Festuca rubra*, thrift *Armeria maritima*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and spring squill *Scilla verna*. The cliff ledges support a range of plant species which thrive close to the sea. These include plants such as Scots lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*, sea campion *Silene uniflora*, angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, red campion *Silene dioica*, roseroot *Sedum rosea* and primrose *Primula vulgaris*.

### **Seabird colony**

More than 10,000 pairs of seabirds nest in the crevices and ledges of the cliffs, making this site of national importance for breeding seabirds. The seabird colony includes large numbers of guillemot *Uria aalge* and kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, as well as fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, razorbill *Alca torda*, puffin *Fratercula arctica*, shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, herring gull *Larus argentatus* and great black-backed gull *L. marinus*.

### **Guillemot**

Large numbers of guillemot, representing more than 1% of the UK population, breed on the cliffs of Dunnet Head.

/see overleaf

## NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act as three separate sites - Easter Head to Little Score SSSI, Dunnet Head SSSI and part of Point of Ness to Chapel Geo SSSI: 1979

Re-notified under the 1981 Act with an amended boundary as Dunnet Head SSSI: 7 June 1985

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 16 December 2010

## REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 91.02 ha).

Dunnet Head SSSI is part of the North Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for the birds listed below.

- Birds
- : Seabird assemblage, breeding
  - : Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), breeding
  - : Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding
  - : Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), breeding
  - : Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*), breeding
  - : Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), breeding
  - : Razorbill (*Alca torda*), breeding