



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdair air fad airson Alba air fad

**EILEAN NA MUICE DUIBHE**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 604**

**Address: Main Street, Bowmore, Isle of Islay, Argyll, PA43 7JJ**

**Tel: 01496 810711**

**Email: [Argyll\\_Stirling@snh.gov.uk](mailto:Argyll_Stirling@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.

This Statement is available in Gaelic on request.

<b>Natural features of Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Blanket bog	Unfavourable declining (November 2007)	SAC, Ramsar
Greenland white-fronted goose ( <i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i> ), non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (November 2008)	SPA, Ramsar

<b>Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>Designation (SAC or SPA)</b>
Depressions on peat substrates	Unfavourable, declining (November 2007)	SAC

## Description of the site

Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI is situated on the Hebridean Island of Islay, approximately 4 km south of Bowmore. The site encompasses an area of nationally and internationally important peatland habitat and is also one of the most important roost sites in Europe for wintering Greenland white-fronted geese.



The extensive blanket bog within Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI is a habitat listed as 'priority' on Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive. The area has a well developed bog structure, with lochans and ridges interrupting the relatively flat surface. The bog is dependent on the maintenance of a high water table to support its rich peatland flora which contains a high proportion of bog mosses (sphagna), but also includes plants such as sundews, heather, bog myrtle, cotton grasses and a range of sedges. The quality of the undisturbed area of blanket bog has resulted in Eilean na Muice Duibhe being recognised as a Special Area of Conservation under the EC Habitats Directive and as a Ramsar Site.

Internationally important numbers of Greenland white-fronted geese roost on and around the

bog pools during the winter, thus qualifying the site as a Special Protection Area under the EC Birds Directive and as a Ramsar Site under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Other important bird species which occur on the site include red-throated diver, merlin, golden plover, whooper swan and hen harrier.

Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI is within the Argyll and Islands Environmentally Sensitive Area. In 1993 part of the site was also designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), however in 2010 after national review of NNRs the site was de-declared.

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2007 found the blanket bog feature of Eilean na Muice Duibhe to be in unfavourable condition due to damage from burning and a lack of positive indicator species. However the Greenland white-fronted goose feature of the site, monitored in 2008, was found to be in favourable maintained condition with the mean number of wintering Greenland white-fronted geese occupying the site having increased and the suitability of the site for roosting having been maintained.

Picture 1. Evidence of past peat cutting works.	Picture 2. Greenland white-fronted goose.
	

### Past and present management

The traditional use of the site has been as rough grazing for sheep. Shooting, particularly of wildfowl, has also taken place on the site.

Peat cutting for domestic fuel is an established practice on the moss. Considerable controversy arose in the 1980s when commercial peat extraction for whisky production was proposed. SNH's predecessor, the Nature Conservancy Council, objected to this development because of the damage that drainage and peat removal would cause to the natural condition of the bog habitat. Eventually, a mutually acceptable settlement was reached in which the NCC purchased peat cutting rights at Castlehill from where the distilling company could extract peat on a commercial basis. Twenty-two hectares of Eilean na Muice Duibhe were damaged directly by the drainage works carried out. It is likely that the lowering of the water table in this area also affected a significant proportion of the remainder of the site.

Eilean na Muice Duibhe is now being managed for nature conservation through management agreements with the owners and occupiers. Peat cutting is limited by agreement so that the water table is protected from the drying elements and can be maintained close to the bog surface. At Torra, where the commercial peat extraction in the late 1980s caused significant drying out of the bog surface, remedial work has taken place to restore the water table to former levels by blocking drains, ditches and peat cuttings with peat bunds and oaken dams. This has been ongoing since 1993 and early indications are that the water table is rising and

that the natural peatland vegetation is starting to return to the rewetted areas of the bog surface.

The blanket bog has also suffered extensive fire damage in the past due to deliberate fires started by vandals. The most recent of these was in May 2010 and around 90 ha of the SSSI was damaged. Rhododendron is also encroaching on the northern side of the site.

The site has no direct management agreements under the local Islay Goose Management Scheme as it is principally a roost site rather than a feeding area, however the geese that use the SSSI benefit from the scheme at other sites.

### **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 to monitor the effectiveness of the management agreements.

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, where such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below 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).

#### **1. Maintain the suitability of the site for the internationally important wintering populations of Greenland white-fronted geese in order to meet national and international obligations.**

Current management of Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI appears to be benefitting the wintering populations of Greenland white-fronted geese. In addition, SNH staff will continue to monitor goose roost usage and feeding across the SSSI. This data will ensure that any changes in site usage or population declines/rises can be detected and appropriate management advised.

It is also important that the SSSI remains relatively undisturbed with little recreational pressure to enable the continued usage of the area by geese.

#### **2. Maintain and where possible enhance the blanket bog habitat within Eilean na Muice Duibhe SSSI.**

To bring the SSSI into favourable condition the water levels across the site need to be maintained and ideally raised to prevent drying of the blanket bog habitat. This should be achieved through continued blocking of drainage ditches and maintenance of existing dams. Grazing should remain low across the site and rhododendron control work should continue, to eradicate this invasive species from the SSSI. Encroaching conifers across the western boundary of the SSSI should also be controlled to prevent further spread throughout the site. The extensive fire damage which has occurred within the SSSI, should recover in time, however in the meantime SNH will continue to liaise with owners of the site to consider measures to prevent these fires.

Date last reviewed: 3 February 2011