

CITATION

FAIR ISLE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Shetland Islands

Site code: 620

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: HZ 213720

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 4
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 466

AREA: 561.34 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

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| Geological: | Palaeontology: | Palaeozoic Palaeobotany |
| Biological: | Upland habitat: | Moorland juniper |
| | Birds: | Arctic skua (<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>), breeding |
| | | Fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>), breeding |
| | | Great skua (<i>Stercorarius skua</i>), breeding |
| | | Guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>), breeding |
| | | Kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>), breeding |
| | | Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>), breeding |
| | | Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>), breeding |
| | | Seabird colony, breeding |

DESCRIPTION:

Fair Isle is an isolated 761 hectare island lying between Mainland Shetland and Orkney. The SSSI comprises the whole of the northern three-quarters of the island, plus the rest of the coastline, including offshore stacks. It is notified for its plant fossils, moorland juniper, and colonies of breeding seabirds.

Geological

The island is comprised of Old Red Sandstone and is the only site in Britain to yield an undoubted example of a *Svalbardia* Zone flora (probably Givetian in age), found at Sloagar, Bu Ness. The assemblage is dominated by *Svalbardia*, which is an important evolutionary link between the primitive forms of progymnosperm (eg. *Rellimia* and the later, more advanced forms of that group (eg. *Archaeopteris*). Other species also occur here, but have yet to be described. The locality is of great potential research interest for the understanding of the younger floras of the Middle Devonian geological period.

Biological

Fair Isle is the most southerly of the Shetland group, with vegetation varying from spray-influenced maritime grassland swards to sub-maritime heather moorland of a northern 'Caledonian' type. Prostrate dwarf juniper *Juniperus communis nana*, now scarce throughout the rest of Shetland, remains common over extensive areas of the moorland and is a notified feature.

Fair Isle hosts important seabird breeding colonies, and is notified for Arctic skua, fulmar, great skua, guillemot, kittiwake, razorbill and shag. Most of these species represent more than 1% of their respective British populations, though there have been severe declines in the numbers of kittiwake and shag.

The seabird colonies as a whole are also a notified feature, one of the components of which is gannet *Morus bassanus* – a recent colonist which is increasing rapidly in number.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1963 (whole island)

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 2 August 1984 with a 200 ha decrease in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 06 September 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 592.48 ha).

Fair Isle SSSI is designated as Fair Isle Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats listed below and as part of the Fair Isle Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

- Habitats : Dry heaths
: Vegetated sea cliffs
- Birds : Arctic skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
: Arctic tern *Sterna paradisaea*
: Fair Isle wren *Troglodytes troglodytes fridariensis*
: Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
: Gannet *Morus bassanus*
: Great skua *Stercorarius skua*
: Guillemot *Uria aalge*
: Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
: Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
: Razorbill *Alca torda*
: Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
Breeding seabird assemblage