



Scottish Natural Heritage
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FOWLSHEUGH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 660

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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

Fowlsheugh holds the largest colony of breeding seabirds on the north-east of Scotland mainland, and is an important component of a network of sites for breeding sea birds in Britain and Europe. The site consists of a 1.8 km length of sheer cliffs, between 30 and 60 metres high, together with a narrow strip of cliff-top grasslands. The cliffs are mostly basalt and conglomerates of Old Red Sandstone. They form a rock face with innumerable holes and ledges, which provide ideal sites for cliff nesting seabirds.

The site is designated as an SSSI and as a Special Protection Area under Article 4(2) of the European Birds Directive 79/409 for its overall assemblage of breeding seabirds, more than 100 000 individuals, and for its important populations of several species. These include nationally or internationally important breeding populations of kittiwake (36 650 birds comprising 7.5% of the British; and 1% of the world population), guillemot (56 450 birds comprising 5% of the British and EC, and 1.7% of the Western European populations) and razorbill (5 800 individuals, comprising 4% of British and 3% of the EC populations). Also notable are the breeding populations of fulmar and herring gull, and the locally important populations of puffin, shag, lesser black-backed and great black-backed gulls.

In 2009 Fowlsheugh SPA was extended to include adjacent inshore waters, to about 2km.

A small section of the cliff, at the southern end of the site, is included within the site boundary of Crawton Bay SSSI which is designated for its geological interest.

Natural features of Fowlsheugh SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Seabird colony	Favourable, maintained (2002)	SPA
Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Unfavourable, declining (2000) [#]	SPA*
Guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i>	Favourable, maintained (2000)	SPA
Razorbill <i>Alca torda</i>	Unfavourable, declining (2000) [#]	SPA*
Fulmar <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Not yet formally assessed*	SPA*
Puffin <i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Not yet formally assessed	

*Favourable maintained (June 1999) for SPA.

[#]Amended assessment

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Herring gull	Not yet formally assessed	SPA

The feature condition for both kittiwake and razorbill is Favourable maintained and Unfavourable Declining in the SPA and SSSI respectively. The population size for both of these species fell between the SSSI designation and the SPA selection, so the baseline figures that are used for assessment are different.

The trend for falling seabird numbers is consistent with national trends, thought to be linked to changes in food supply outside the designated site.

Past and present management

The cliff tops were grazed by sheep until 1989 and there was some infilling of the Trollochy blow-hole by the previous owner, for the purpose of stock safety. There has been considerable upgrading of the public footpath that runs along the cliff top for the benefit of visitors to the seabird colony.

The site has been owned and managed as a reserve by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) since 1976. A reserve management plan, drawn-up in agreement with SNH, is reviewed every 5 years. The main purpose of the plan is to safeguard the bird colony and to provide for visitor interpretation and safety, whilst preventing disturbance to the birds on the cliffs below. Some proposals for the management of the cliff top grassland are also included.

Information boards provide on-site interpretation. The RSPB have also encouraged environmental education and limited access through guided walks, boat trips and in previous years a seasonal warden was based in a temporary portacabin which also acted as a reserve centre.

Other ad hoc activities include fishing at Crawton Ness, scuba diving at Trollochy and Spurnell's Cove and occasional burning of gorse by unknown third parties, most recently in 1992.

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

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers 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.

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. To maintain populations and overall assemblage of breeding seabirds

The principal interest of the site is the breeding seabird population and any operation which may damage that interest or disturb breeding birds should be avoided.

2. To encourage the public to safely visit the site and provide appropriate interpretation

The dangerous cliff edges are a safety hazard for visitors. However, this inaccessibility also affords a large measure of protection to the birds. The popularity of the site with visitors causes some very limited disturbance to the birds. It also presents erosion pressures on cliff vegetation, which requires some ongoing maintenance of footpaths.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The seabird populations, particularly their breeding success, are likely to be affected by external factors, such as food availability, and marine pollution, especially oil spills.

Date last reviewed: 2 June 2011.