Scottish Natural Heritage

GARRION GILL
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 673

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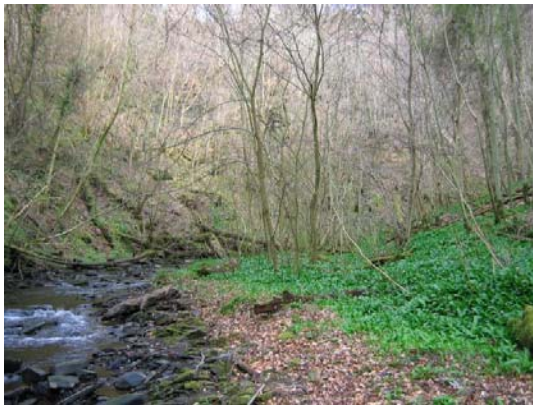
Purpose



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

Garrion Gill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), lying approximately 3km to the south of Wishaw, comprises mixed broad-leaved woodland which is semi-natural in origin and is considered 'ancient'.

The site is one of 11 woodland SSSI's that form the Clyde Valley Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These woodlands are designated under EU and UK law as they contain an EU priority habitat (mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes) and comprise the most extensive areas of ash-elm woodland within Scotland.

This ash-elm woodland occurs on the slopes of Garrion Gill gorge with oak interspersed and alder on wetter ground. Hazel is characteristic of the understorey, whilst birch is prevalent throughout the wood. Scots pine appears in the southern reaches of the site, presumably seeding into the wood from a plantation that abuts the site perimeter. Non-native species such as beech, larch and sycamore are found within the site, the former seeding from trees and hedges planted on the woodland margins.

The woodland has an interesting associated ground flora which includes broad-leaved helleborine, alternate leaved golden saxifrage and an uncommon variety of hart's-tongue fern. Further botanical interest includes two mosses that thrive under wet 'Atlantic' conditions; *Hookeria lucens* and *Nowellia curvifolia.*

The woodland is considered to be in a favourable condition as a good age structure can be found throughout, there is a good proportion of deadwood present and successful regeneration of native tree species is seen across the site. Whilst non-native tree species (beech and sycamore) are found throughout the site they are present at low levels, in contrast to many of the other Clyde valley woodland sites, and as such are not a cause for concern. Expansion of the woodland to the west of the site has occurred since the last monitoring visit. There is however evidence of localised heavy grazing, though the majority of the site is subject to light to moderate grazing which is beneficial to the woodland biodiversity.

Although not part of the notified interest, the grassland, scrub and the variety of invertebrates are of additional interest. The herb rich, semi-improved grassland and scrub (comprising blackthorn, hawthorn and birch, with willow present on wetter soils) found on the gentler slopes of the gorge play an important role in the lifecycle of certain invertebrate species. The rich invertebrate fauna comprises a variety of saproxylic invertebrates (species dependent on dead or decaying tree wood). Of particular interest is the nationally scarce *Cerylon fagi*, a small black beetle that lives under bark in rotten wood. Further saproxylic invertebrates include the hoverfly *Sphegina elegans* and the fly *Clusiodes verticalis*, which is one of the more scarce *Clusiodes* species. In addition, the leaf beetle *Chrysolina varians* is present on the site which, although found nationally, is localised in its habits. Of further note are the badgers that use this woodland.

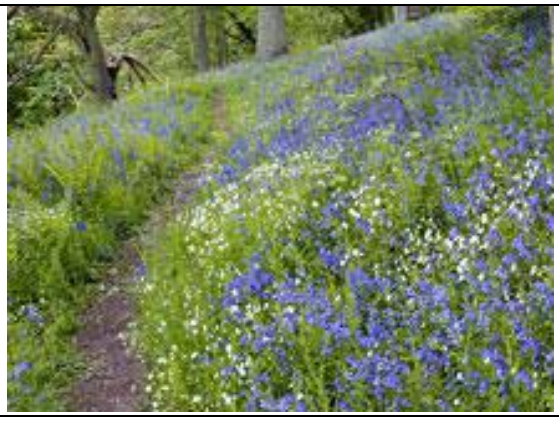
Natural features of Garrion Gill SSSI	**Condition of feature** (date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Upland mixed ash woodland	Favourable, maintained (April 2009)	SAC

The site is also an important component of the Clyde Valley Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which has the following qualifying feature:

- Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes

The Clyde Valley Woods SAC is comprised of eleven individual woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest, lying in the often steep sided gorges around several of the tributary rivers to the Clyde in Lanarkshire. This SAC contains the most extensive areas of ash-elm woodland in Scotland.

The condition of this qualifying feature, considered across the whole SAC, has been assessed as favourable, despite the number of non-native trees present. The favourable condition is as much a result of non-intervention as of any activities or events that are taking place. Though some of the flatter areas have historically been felled, coppiced or otherwise managed, the steep sided nature of the gorges on which these woodlands grow has made it difficult for much interference to have taken place since their original development following the last ice-age.

	
Alternate-leaved golden saxifrage	Spring flowers at Clyde Valley Woods SAC

Past and present management

Management in the past has involved timber extraction and tree planting in the Jacob's Ladder area. Coppicing of hazel, birch, sycamore, willow and ash also occurred throughout the site with a more extensive area of hazel coppice on more level ground to the south.

Opencast coal mining was carried out adjacent to the site where a large spoil heap now dominates the landscape. A disused mine shaft from an earlier period of mining activity is situated within the site below Rosebank. The area surrounding the mineshaft is showing signs of subsidence which may pose a potential threat to public safety.

Currently the site forms part of Clyde Valley Woods SAC and is either managed for conservation, under a number of different management agreements with SNH, or is under no active management. Land management activities include sheep and cattle grazing, felling of mature beech and sycamore, and planting of native broadleaves and conifers at the woodland edge. Informal recreation including fishing and walking occurs within the site. The grazing animals help to maintain plant diversity, however overgrazing has occurred on the north-eastern side of the site.

LIFE funding is available to support positive management. Current management prescriptions are focused on the maintenance of stock-proof boundaries, removal of fly tipping, dealing with unsafe trees, bracken control and the thinning and eradication of non-native invasive species such as rhododendron, sycamore and beech. Approximately 85% of the SSSI is under LIFE funded management agreements, with 10 year management plans due to end in 2014.

The management agreements between SNH and two of the SSSI land owners enable the owners to maintain the woodland edge through planting and maintenance of native trees and shrubs, vegetation cutting and stock-proof fence maintenance. Both agreements are due for reassessment in 2010.

The southern part of the site is owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). Footpaths in this section have been upgraded to encourage recreational and educational use with guided walks and field trips.

Scottish Power maintains wayleaves for powerlines and the timber felled in these areas has been stacked on site with prolific regrowth from the cut stools.

Burning of grassland areas by vandals, close to Overtown, has occurred within the site. The burning of the grassland resulted in damage to a small area of the site. Illegal dumping has also occurred at various locations within the site.

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

We wish to work with the owner and/or occupier 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 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, in so far as 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 and enhance, where possible, the natural species composition of the mixed ash woodland** by maintaining appropriate levels of grazing and removing non-native regeneration.

   Grazing by livestock impacts upon the nature of ground vegetation and can also inhibit tree regeneration. Some areas of the woodland are not enclosed by stock-proof fencing, although some of the site is protected by natural topography. While livestock should be excluded to promote native woodland regeneration, the total removal of grazing is undesirable. The removal of livestock may result in a closed canopy, reducing the potential for woodland regeneration, the loss of species diversity and the spread of non-native trees and invasive species e.g. bracken, which dominates some grassland areas. Cattle and sheep currently have access to the north-east section of the site. Whilst some localised ground poaching has occurred here, the ground flora has not suffered to any great extent and a little regeneration is still occurring despite their presence. This low level of grazing should be maintained. Grassland habitats created by grazing are desirable in their own right as home to uncommon plant species and for their role in the lifecycle of certain invertebrate species.

   Non-native tree species such as beech and sycamore are present throughout the SSSI. Their removal should be undertaken by removing non-native young trees and saplings as they are not component species of the woodland and tend

to out-compete native species if they remain within the site. Beech leaf litter will also smother native ground flora. As felling within such a steep sided gorge is dangerous, potentially damaging to ground flora, may give rise to unstable slopes and could damage or disturb badger setts, it is recommended that non-native trees are ring-barked. Where tree felling is necessary (in the case of works by Scottish Power), tree stumps should be treated to ensure there is no re-growth. Removing non-native shrub species is also important as they can shade out the native ground flora species associated with mixed ash woodland.

2. **To maintain and conserve notable fauna, particularly invertebrates and badgers** by ensuring dead and decaying wood remains within the site to benefit invertebrates. Any non-native trees that cannot be felled, especially those in close proximity to badger setts, should be ring-marked and left as standing dead wood to avoid damage to badger setts. Ring-marking will also provide a substantial source of standing deadwood for dead wood (saproxylic) invertebrates.

Front page photograph: view of Garrion Burn

Date last reviewed: 21 September 2009