

CITATION

GRUINART FLATS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCIL

Site code: 751

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NR285665

AREA: 3261.32 hectares

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 60
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 353

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

GEOLOGICAL:	Geomorphological:	Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland
GEOLOGICAL:	Structural and metamorphic geology:	Dalradian
BIOLOGICAL:	Supralittoral sediment (Coast):	Sand dune Shingle
BIOLOGICAL:	Littoral sediment (Marine):	Mudflat
BIOLOGICAL:	Littoral sediment (Coast):	Saltmarsh
BIOLOGICAL:	Bogs:	Blanket bog
BIOLOGICAL:	Non vascular plants:	Lichen assemblage
BIOLOGICAL:	Birds:	Greenland barnacle goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>) Greenland white-fronted goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) Light-bellied brent goose (<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>) Chough (<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>)

DESCRIPTION:

Gruinart Flats SSSI lies approximately 5km to the north-west of Bridgend on the Isle of Islay. The site comprises a diverse array of coastal habitats typical of western Scotland. The main features are a sheltered estuarine and intertidal sea loch (holding sand and mud-flats as well as an extensive saltmarsh and sand dunes) surrounded by pastoral farmland and backed by semi-natural woodland and upland habitats, including ombrogenous peatlands. These habitats support a variety of bird species including geese and chough.

The site is of national importance for a range of coastal and intertidal habitats, marsh and low level blanket bog. The saltmarshes not only form an integral part of the assemblage of coastal forms on Islay, but also are nationally important for studies of saltmarsh geomorphology. They demonstrate particularly well the geomorphological characteristics of loch-head and fringing saltmarshes, a type confined mainly to

Scotland and Norway. They are also unusual in Great Britain in that they have developed, and continue to develop, on an emerging coast.

The Bun-an Uillt Geological Conservation Review Site, on the eastern side of Loch Gruinart, is of interest for providing the only known exposure through the 'Loch Skerrols Thrust'. This is a fault in the crust between the Maol an Fhithich Quartzite of the Lochaber Subgroup (of the Dalradian Supergroup), and the Bowmore Sandstone. The Dalradian rocks originated as marine sediments, deposited around 650 million years ago. It is uncertain to which major group of rocks the Bowmore Sandstone belongs, it being variously correlated with the Moine, the Torridonian and the Dalradian. Both the Maol an Fhithich Quartzite and the Bowmore Sandstone were metamorphosed around 470 million years ago during the Caledonian orogeny (tectonic movements that gave rise to the Highlands). The 'Loch Skerrols Thrust' is of considerable importance in terms of aiding an understanding of: the geology of Islay; the Bowmore Sandstone and its relationship with the Dalradian; and the wider relationships with the Lewisian rocks, the Colonsay Group and the Caledonian orogenic event.

The estuary supports an important mosaic of soft coastal habitats from mudflats through to dunes. The dunes at Killinallan and Ardnave form a relatively undisturbed loch mouth system rarely found in Britain. Coastal vegetated shingle is a rare habitat and most examples in the UK qualify for notification.

The low-level blanket bog is a good example of recovering bog which has an abundance of typical bog species across the site. It also has a system of pools which support roosting geese.

The assemblage of lichens growing on the trees within the woodland at Coill a' Chorra Ghoirtein is of national importance. It includes a number of Lobarion species and the notable *Bactrospora homalotropa* and *Thelotrema petractoides*.

The site is of international importance for the over-wintering Greenland breeding population of the barnacle goose, the Greenland sub-species of the white-fronted goose and the north East Canadian High Arctic population of the light-bellied brent goose. From 2000–2003 the site held around 24% of the GB population of Greenland barnacle geese, around 6% of the GB population of Greenland white-fronted geese throughout the winter and 2% of the of the East Canadian High Arctic population of light-bellied brent geese on autumn passage. The saltmarsh at Gruinart Flats provides an ideal location for barnacle and light-bellied brent geese to roost. Greenland white-fronted geese roost on the bog pools in the southern part of the site. The arable land around the loch provides feeding for all species of geese throughout the winter.

The site also supports internationally-important numbers of breeding and feeding chough. Between 2000 and 2004 the site supported approximately 1.3% of the GB population of breeding pairs along with around 4.7% of the GB population of roosting and non-breeding feeding birds in autumn and winter. The dune system at Ardnave is particularly important for these large flocks.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act in 1963.

Renotified under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act on 24 November 1983.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 1 September 2006

REMARKS

Gruinart Flats SSSI is also classified as Gruinart Flats, Islay Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds listed below. All of these European features are also protected natural features of the SSSI:

Birds - aggregations of non-breeding birds	Barnacle goose (Greenland breeding population)
	Greenland white-fronted goose
	Light-bellied brent goose
	Chough
Birds - aggregations of breeding birds	Chough