Scottish Natural Heritage

HASCOSAY
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 767

Ground Floor
Stewart Building
Alexandra Wharf
Lerwick
ZE1 0LL
Tel: 01595 693345
E: northern_isles@snh.gov.uk

Purpose

Ramna Geo – Grey Bearded Man, Hascosay

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.

Natural features of Hascosay SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Blanket Bog	Favourable maintained (August 2001)	Hascosay SAC
Dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), breeding	Favourable maintained (June 2002)	
Moine	Favourable maintained (September 2009)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation (SPA or SAC)
Otter (*Lutra lutra*)	Unfavourable declining (September 2009)	Hascosay SAC

Description of the site

The central area of Hascosay Site of Special Scientific Interest is one of the best and most intact areas of blanket bog in Shetland with an almost uninterrupted mire surface dominated by mosses together with heather and common cotton-grass sedge. The bog is active (i.e. still forming peat) with a high proportion of peat-forming *Sphagnum* mosses but also has an unusual abundance and diversity of other moss species. The site displays most of the typical features of Shetland mires, including the finest examples in the islands of the characteristic Shetland type of pool margins composed of bryophytes but lacking *Sphagnum.* The presence of *Sphagnum fuscum,* a sensitive species, indicates that the blanket bog is relatively undisturbed.

The island supports a large population of dunlin, breeding at the highest density recorded in Shetland. Otters also occur at high densities; although they are not a notified feature of the SSSI they are a feature of Hascosay Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Most recent monitoring of the otter population found the population to be declining. This is thought to be as a result of a reduction in food availability as there has been no reduction in suitable habitat. The conditions of all three SSSI features were found to be favourable at the most recent monitoring visit.

The island is also an important site for understanding the geological evolution of Shetland and of the Caledonian orogenic belt (an area of rocks, extending from Scotland to northern Norway and also found in eastern USA, that formed the roots of a mountain chain thrown up when America and Europe collided around 400 million years ago). The island lies on the boundary between the rocks of Yell on the one hand and Unst and Fetlar on the other. These two rock sequences date from two distinct periods of geological history. Those of Unst are related to the Dalradian rocks which form most of the Scottish highlands to the south of the Great Glen whilst the Yell rocks are thought to belong to the Moine sequence found to the north of the Great Glen. They are separated here by a band of deformed rocks almost a kilometre wide, visible in the cliffs around Ramna Geo and Grey-bearded Man. This zone of sheared, compressed and recrystallised rock is interpreted as a 'slide' - a zone where the rocks on one side have slid past those on the other.

Past and present management

The land within the SSSI is believed to have served as rough grazing during the historic past. Hascosay once supported a small community which may have cut peat on the SSSI although no scars can now be identified. More recently (1950s) the inhabitants of Fetlar obtained peat from around Djuba Wick in the north of the site and abandoned workings are clearly visible here. There is also evidence of a limited amount of drainage work having been undertaken around Taingar and inland from Ramna Geo in the past. Otherwise the peatland remains undisturbed.

The SSSI is entirely rough grazing for sheep, the numbers of which were previously limited by a management agreement. This agreement has since expired, however monitoring in 2009 indicates that there is currently no damage to the bog caused by grazing. Lambing takes place on the island and the lambs are removed in autumn. Winter feeding is not possible so the stocking level is determined by the available winter grazing.

Dunlin	Sphagnum moss
	

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

We wish to work with the owners and land managers 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 its management.

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. **Maintain grazing at levels appropriate for conserving the peatland vegetation and maintaining an intact bog surface.**
   Current levels of grazing appear to be compatible with maintaining the bog in a favourable condition. It is important that a suitable grazing intensity is maintained as over grazing could lead to erosion and loss of integrity of the peatland.

2. **Avoid increases to drainage.**
   New drainage regimes or alterations to existing ones could dry the peat surface and cause the loss of *Sphagnum*, halting peat formation. This could also be harmful to otters which require year-round access to freshwater to wash salt from their coats.

3. **Avoid disturbance to breeding birds.**
   Activities likely to disturb the dunlin population should be avoided, particularly during the breeding season. Disturbance of nest sites may result in eggs or chicks being left unattended and so vulnerable to predation.

4. **Maintain the visibility and accessibility of the geological features of the site.**
   Dumping of soil or other materials will obscure rock faces and should be avoided. Small scale geological collecting is unlikely to cause damage, however large operations involving explosives or drilling would be harmful to the moine feature.

Date last reviewed: 17 January 2011