



Scottish Natural Heritage
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INCHTAVANNACH AND INCHCONNACHAN
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 808

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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.

Natural Features of Inchtavannach and Inchconnachan SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland oak woodland	Unfavourable, no change (March 2002)	SAC
Capercaillie (<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>), breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2000)	SPA

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature condition (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Favourable, maintained (August 2003)	SAC
Greenland white-fronted goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>), non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (February 2009)	SPA

Description of the site

The islands of Inchtavannach and Inchconnachan are situated at the south-western end of Loch Lomond and together comprise Inchtavannach and Inchconnachan SSSI notified for its upland oak woodland and for its populations of breeding capercaillie.

The canopy of Inchtavannach island is dominated by ancient oak-birch woodland and the ground flora is rich in mosses and liverworts typical of western acid oak woodland. The tree cover of Inchconnachan is more varied. The southern section is dominated by oak-birch woodland, however the northern section has been planted with larch and throughout the island there is also some Scots pine and spruce. The ground flora of Inchconnachan is dominated by blaeberry with heather present in higher areas and bracken present in lower areas where there are gaps in the canopy. Both islands have a damper belt in the centre with birch and alder and

a ground layer of moss.

Inchconnachan and Inchtavannach also provide suitable feeding and breeding habitat for capercaillie which are present throughout the year and breed on both islands.

These islands are also part of Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is of European importance for its Atlantic oakwoods and its otter population. The site also forms part of the Loch Lomond Special Protection Area (SPA) which qualifies for its populations of capercaillie and Greenland white-fronted goose (not present on this site).

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2000 found the Capercaillie feature of the SSSI to be in favourable condition with the site supporting over 1% of the UK breeding population for this species. However, more recent population counts suggest the species has suffered severe declines in the area and future site condition monitoring is likely to find the capercaillie feature of this site to be in unfavourable declining condition.

The upland oak woodland feature, monitored in 2002, was found to be in unfavourable condition with the woodland failing the targets for age structure, dead wood, browsing impact, successful regeneration and non-natives. Management should therefore be reviewed, particularly with respect to regeneration, browsing and non-natives to allow the woodland to recover and come into favourable condition.

The otter feature of the overlapping Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), monitored in 2003, and the Greenland white-fronted goose feature of the overlapping Loch Lomond Special Protection Area (SPA), monitored in 2009, were both found to be in favourable maintained condition.

Picture 1. View from within Inchconnachan woods.	Picture 2. Boats landing at Inchconnachan.
	

Past and present management

It is known that the oaks on Inchtavannach were planted from Dutch stock approximately 200-300 years ago and were managed to supply small timber products and tannin for the factory at Balloch. Inchconnachan has a similar history with woodland management continuing up to the present. In the 1960s, approximately 4-6 red-necked wallabies were released onto Inchconnachan, which have bred and are still present on the island today.

From 1996-2001 Luss Estates entered into a Woodland Grant Scheme on Inchconnachan

which entailed the felling of an area of mature European Larch and restocking with Caledonian pine and native broadleaves. Subsequent discussion in Summer 2001 led to a verbal agreement between Luss estates, SNH and the Forestry Commission to restock the felled area with native broadleaves only and to continue bracken spraying. Scottish Wildlife Trust Volunteer teams have also carried out the removal of invasive rhododendron and beech.

From 2002-2007 both islands were included in a Capercaillie LIFE Project which supported removal of invasive species and research into the ecology of capercaillie.

At present a family is permanently resident on Inchtavannach and the island is grazed by domestic stock. A fence crosses the island and most stock grazing is to the south of this. Inchconnachan is managed for timber production, there are no domestic stock, only Wallabies, and the island is not permanently inhabited. Both islands are easily accessible by boat and are popular for picnics.

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

We wish to continue to work with the owner 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 improve the condition of the upland oak woodland habitat.

The main factors contributing to the unfavourable condition of Inchtavannach and Inchconnachan SSSI are grazing pressure and the presence of non-native species.

Grazing pressure is affecting a number of the woodland's attributes such as its age structure and the volume of dead wood and management needs to be reviewed. In managing populations of browsing animals in native woodlands, the objective is to maintain the numbers of browsing animals at a level which allows natural regeneration to take place. This is likely to involve a reduction in fallow deer numbers through culling. SNH are working with the owners to determine the best way to take this forward, based on information contained in a browsing impact assessment carried out on the Loch Lomond islands in 2008 and deer population counts. The browsing situation on Inchconnachan is complicated by the presence of wallabies as well as deer, but deer control should be established before the grazing impact of wallabies is assessed.

Rhododendron, beech and non-native conifers are present on both islands and are also a problem requiring management. Rhododendron ponticum can spread rapidly so control work must be maintained within a reasonable period of time to eradicate this species from these islands.

Within the SSSI, bracken is also widespread and dominant in areas of open ground which is likely to be inhibiting woodland regeneration. Therefore bracken control should be carried out where necessary.

SNH will continue to work with the owners of the SSSI to address these issues and opportunities are currently available to support these activities through the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

2. To minimise disturbance and maintain suitable breeding habitat for capercaillie.

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2000 found the capercaillie feature of Inchtavannach and Inchconnachan to be in favourable condition, however more recent surveys carried out as part of the capercaillie LIFE project 2002-2007 found the populations of Loch Lomond capercaillie to have rapidly declined.

The Loch Lomond Capercaillie Working Group (LLCWG) is currently working in partnership to try and reverse these declines. Partners in this project are the private owner of the SSSI, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Ranger Service.

Management activities aimed at increasing available food sources and nesting opportunities for capercaillie are being initiated by the (LLCWG). They are managing rhododendron and bracken control, blaeberry swiping, predator control and raising visitor awareness through publicity and patrol work by National Park rangers to reduce disturbance. It is hoped that these activities will encourage capercaillie numbers to increase and stabilise, so the Loch Lomond populations are maintained.

3. Maintain otter populations and distribution within the SSSI.

Avoid causing significant disturbance to otters within the SSSI, particularly during breeding seasons, and ensure the extent and condition of their habitats within the site is maintained.

Date last reviewed:28 January 2011