



Scottish Natural Heritage

OTTERSWICK

Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 8109

Ground Floor
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Purpose



Red-throated diver

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 Otterswick SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Red-throated diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>), breeding	Favourable, maintained. (July 2002)	SPA

Description of the site

Otterswick SSSI lies within an extensive area of blanket bog with peat depth greater than 1m throughout the site and extensive cover of heather and cotton grass, with carpets of sphagnum moss occurring in places. The site comprises several ridges, each of which contain a series of small peatland pools used by red-throated divers for breeding. Between these ridges lies more gently undulating blanket bog, punctuated by small pools and several larger lochs. In places the peat is eroding, forming eroded peat banks and areas of bare peat. Some of these are slowly being re-colonised by vegetation. The average number of pairs of divers attempting to breed on the site represents about 1.6% of the British population.

Past and present management

Given the exposed nature of this site and its relative remoteness it is unlikely that the site has been used for anything other than rough grazing for sheep in the past.

Currently the site is used for rough grazing by sheep. Parts of four different common grazings, Otterswick and Gossabrough, Burravoe and Arisdale, West Yell and District, and West Sandwick and Herra are included within the site, as is an unregulated area – Willa-mina Hoga. This is currently grazed by shareholders of the first three named common grazings. In addition to this the site overlaps part of two private grazings.

A trig point at Otterswick and another at Evra Houll (lying on the site boundary) are maintained by the Ordnance Survey.

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

We wish to work with the owners 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 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. Avoid disturbance to breeding divers.

Disturbance of nests can lead to unattended eggs being taken by predators. It is therefore important that agricultural activities avoid creating disturbance near nest sites during the breeding season. Recreational activities also have the potential to disturb nest sites and photographers and birdwatchers should be aware that a licence is required to approach breeding divers.

2. To reduce potential collisions between divers and fences.

Avoid further apportionment and ensure that any new fences are located sensitively i.e. well away from established and potential diver breeding pools.

3. Maintain grazing at an appropriate level.

Current grazing levels appear to be compatible with the conservation interests of the site. An increase in stocking rates to more intense levels could result in damage to surface vegetation and erosion which may result in a lowering of the water table affecting important peatland pools.

4. Avoid lowering of water levels in lochs and pools.

New drainage schemes or mechanised drainage would be likely to result in a reduction in water levels in important lochs. This could reduce the potential habitat for red-throated divers and should be avoided.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

External Factors. The population of red-throated divers in Shetland, has fallen significantly since 1983. The causes of this decline remain unclear, although two possibilities are i) a reduction in available food supply in Shetland, leading to reduced breeding success, or even a lack of breeding by some pairs in some years, and ii) an increase in winter mortality, when the birds are away from Shetland.

Date last reviewed: 21 November 2010