RANNOCH LOCHS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 8111

Scottish Natural Heritage
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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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Rannoch Lochs SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Black-throated diver	Favourable, maintained (July 2003)	SPA

Description of the site

Rannoch Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) comprises of a grouping of five freshwater lochs on the periphery of Rannoch Moor in the southern Highlands of Scotland. The component lochs are: Loch Dochard, to the south west; Loch Ossian, Loch na Tota and Loch na Sgeallaig to the north; and Loch Loin nan Donnlaich to the east. The lochs are between 220 and 420 metres above sea level and are all nutrient poor and support a characteristic flora.

The site is nationally important for black-throated divers and supports almost 2% of the British breeding population. In addition, the black-throated divers have a high productivity, averaging around one chick fledged every two years per territory during 1986 to 1998. This compares with a national average of around one chick every three years during the same period. The area is also important in a European context and, with the addition of Lochs Ba, Laidon and Finnart (in the nearby Rannoch Moor SSSI and Black Wood of Rannoch SSSI) is a Special Protection Area under EC Directive 79/409/EEC 'The Birds Directive'.

When monitored in 2003, the site was considered to be in favourable condition. However, it was recognised at that time that a more complete data set would increase confidence in this conclusion and that a long-term monitoring programme would be beneficial.

Past and present management

The owners manage the lochs for angling. Loch nan Tota and Loch na Sgeallaig are fished from the shore only. There are established loch-side footpaths or tracks adjacent to all lochs except Lochan Loin nan Donnlaich. There is a youth hostel at the south west end of Loch Ossian.

Loch na Tota and Loch Sgeallaig are situated amidst an expanse of open bog on which deer stalking is the principal land use. At its closest point, the West Highland Railway Line (Glasgow - Fort William) passes within 150 meters of the south west of Loch na Sgeallaig. To the east of Loch Sgeallaig, a footpath also passes to within about 150 meters of the loch shore. The western end of Loch Ossian is surrounded by open deer forest of heath and bog. Along the northern side of the loch there is mature plantation forestry of non-native conifers. The southern and eastern shore is flanked by a mixture of both non-native conifer plantation and native birch dominated woodland, though the non-native conifers have been thinned. A rough vehicle track circumnavigates the loch and, for the most part, is within 100 meters of the water's edge.

A landrover track runs adjacent to the southern shore of Loch Dochard. The catchment is dominated by open hill ground, used for sheep grazing and deer stalking, with a large Scots pine and birch native woodland regeneration scheme to the south of the loch. For the most part, Lochan Loin nan Donnlaich is surrounded by deer forest but to the east there is a commercial forestry plantation.

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

We wish to work with the owner to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims 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, 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/ increase populations of black-throated divers by reducing/ avoiding significant disturbance.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Occupancy of these lochs by black-throated divers and their ability to breed successfully depends on a range of factors. These include:

<u>Disturbance and water level fluctuations.</u>

Breeding black-throated divers are susceptible to disturbance and to fluctuations in water levels. However, since much of this site is located in remote, upland terrain with,

at present, relatively small numbers of visiting people, disturbance is limited. Although the lochs are used for angling, current levels of this activity would appear not be conflicting with the diver interest of the lochs.

Prey availability.

Breeding can only be successful if the loch contains adequate stocks of fish and invertebrates. Understanding of these requirements is being improved by research underway by the RSPB. The current availability of prey would appear to be adequate to support the diver population but any development which altered this could be detrimental to the divers.

Presence of diver rafts.

One of the component lochs has a diver raft on it. Diver rafts can be important in enabling divers to hatch eggs on lochs with fluctuating water levels. The existing diver raft may require to be retained, maintained and monitored. Additional diver rafts may be considered appropriate.

Predation.

Black-throated divers are vulnerable to predation during the egg and early chick stages. Targeted control may be necessary to protect the divers. Encouragement of nesting on islands or rafts will provide some protection from terrestrial predators. Small diver chicks are vulnerable to predation by pike. This fish is not a natural component of these lochs but may have been introduced to some lochs in the area for angling purposes. Care should be taken to avoid the introduction of this species within the SSSI and adjacent waters.

Catchment land use and nutrient status of lochs.

All the lochs within the SSSI are nutrient poor, the type generally favoured by black-throated divers. Unnatural nutrient enrichment of the SSSI lochs would be of concern. Since changes in the nutrient status could be caused by activities away from the actual water body (for example, commercial forestry development), as well as within the water body, the use of the land within the catchment, as well as the management of the waterbodies themselves will be of relevance to ensuring the long term conservation of the divers. Restoration of native woodlands within the catchment areas is likely to be beneficial as native woodland cover could improve nutrient recycling processes and enhance the food chain.

Date last reviewed: 28 March 2008