

CITATION

NORTH LOWTHER UPLANDS
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Dumfries and Galloway / South Lanarkshire

Site code: 8161

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NS 794199

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 71
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 328, 329

AREA: 7833.3 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological :	Mineralogy:	Mineralogy of Scotland
Biological:	Upland habitats:	Upland assemblage
Biological:	Birds:	Breeding bird assemblage
Biological	Birds:	Hen harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> , breeding

DESCRIPTION

The North Lowther Uplands SSSI is situated to the south of the Muirkirk Uplands SSSI and approximately 4km north of Sanquhar in upper Nithsdale and extends north into South Lanarkshire 6km south of Douglas.

The North Lowther Uplands SSSI contains the Bail Hill Geological Conservation Review (GCR) site which displays a section through the "throat" of a volcano. This was active 480 million years ago at a time when the Southern Uplands were being laid down as sediments on the floor of an ancient ocean, the Iapetus Ocean. The area around Bught Craig shows a wide variety of rock types erupted by the volcano and a number of different rock types that collapsed into the volcano before it became extinct.

The North Lowther Uplands SSSI supports a range of upland habitats and associated species showing good examples of the characteristic plant communities of the Southern Uplands. The dominant habitats include blanket bog, wet and dry heaths and acid grassland. On steeper and hence better drained areas *Calluna vulgaris*-*Erica cinerea* heath (heather-bell heather) is found but as altitude increases this grades into heather-blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* heath.

On flatter areas the vegetation largely comprises a range of blanket bog and wet heath communities; with heather and hare's-tail cottongrass blanket mire being the most widespread community. Good examples of deergrass and hare's-tail cottongrass blanket mire, some with hummock/hollow structure, are found around the Spango area. Some of the blanket mire community types support hummocks of two rare species of bog moss *Sphagnum fuscum* and *Sphagnum imbricatum*. The

White Rig area supports some good examples of cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* - *Sphagnum papillosum* blanket mire.

The North Lowther Uplands SSSI also has a mosaic of upland grassland habitats, including localised areas of mat grass *Nardus stricta* - heath bedstraw acid grassland.

The range of habitats, many of them heather dominated, provide a mosaic of breeding and foraging habitats for the diverse upland bird community which is of national importance. Amongst the species present are hen harrier, short-eared owl, merlin, peregrine, golden plover, red grouse, raven, dunlin, snipe, teal, curlew, redshank, whinchat and wheatear.

The breeding population of hen harriers is of both national and European importance.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949: 1971 as Rough Flow Moss SSSI.

Re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: 30 January 1987 as Rough Flow Moss SSSI with a 1639 ha increase in area.

Re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: 08 March 2000 as North Lowther Uplands SSSI with a 6418 ha increase in area (notification lapsed 8 December 2000).

Re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: 27 September 2001 as North Lowther Uplands with a 6413.5 ha increase in area (notification confirmed 15 May 2002 with a 442 ha decrease in area).

Notification reviewed under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004: 28 October 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 7833 ha).

The North Lowther Uplands SSSI is designated as part of the Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

Birds: Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, *breeding and non-breeding*
 Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, *breeding*
 Merlin *Falco columbarius*, *breeding*
 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, *breeding*
 Short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*, *breeding*