

CITATION

INVERPOLLY
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Wester Ross, Sutherland)

Site code: 817

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC 135125

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 15
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 439 and 442

AREA: 11877.47 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Quaternary geology and geomorphology: Quaternary of Scotland

Biological: Freshwater habitats: Oligotrophic loch
Upland habitats: Upland assemblage
Bogs: Blanket bog
Woodlands: Upland birch woodland
Vascular plants: Norwegian mugwort (*Artemisia norvegica*)
Invertebrates: Beetle (*Otiorhynchus auropunctatus*)
Moths
Birds: Breeding bird assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Inverpolly Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 15km north of Ullapool, in northwest Sutherland. The site is nationally important for a range of habitats: upland vegetation, freshwater lochs, blanket bog and woodland. The site is also nationally important for breeding birds, rare plants, moths and beetles, and the sequence of sediments beneath Loch Sionascaig.

Quaternary of Scotland

The undisturbed sediments beneath Loch Sionascaig contain a record of the environmental history of northwest Scotland since the end of the last glaciation around 14,500 years ago. Analysis of pollen grains in the loch sediments, supported by radiocarbon dating, shows how the vegetation changed in this area during the Devensian Late glacial and Holocene geological periods. The chemistry of the loch sediments provides an independent record of soil changes within the catchment, indicating important vegetation-soil relationships. Diatom analyses have provided information on changes in the loch's water chemistry and nutrient status. In addition, a radiocarbon-dated pollen diagram from a bog on Eilean Mór, an island within Loch Sionascaig, provides a detailed record of the local Holocene vegetation history.

Oligotrophic loch (low-nutrient loch)

There are several large, low-nutrient lochs within Inverpolly SSSI including Loch Sionascaig and Loch Veyatie. These have a variety of plants that grow in lochs with clear water and low nutrient levels, including shoreweed *Littorella uniflora*, water awlwort *Subularia aquatica*, quillwort *Isoetes lacustris*, alternate water-milfoil *Myriophyllum alterniflorum* and water lobelia *Lobelia dortmanna*. Some of the lochs also have species that are generally found in more nutrient-rich waters such as translucent stonewort *Nitella translucens*, intermediate water starwort *Callitriche hamulata* and long-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton praelongus*. Spring quillwort *Isoetes echinospora*, a plant with a restricted distribution, is found in Loch Veyatie.

Upland assemblage (upland plant communities)

The upland assemblage has several component habitats **Alpine moss heath and associated vegetation** is largely confined to the summit of Cùl Mòr, with some small patches on Cùl Beag. This habitat is dominated by mat grass *Nardus stricta*, stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii* and wavy hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*. The nationally scarce pyramidal bugle *Ajuga pyramidalis*, thyme broomrape *Orobanche alba* and Alpine bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpina* also grow in this habitat.

Alpine heath occurs mainly on exposed ground above 500m, principally on Cùl Mòr, but with some areas on Cùl Beag and the summit of An Laogh. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and woolly fringe moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are the dominant species. Other species found in this community include wavy hair grass, cypress-leaved plait-moss *Hypnum cupressiforme* and the nationally scarce cold eyebright *Euphrasia frigida* and ostenfeldii eyebright *Euphrasia ostenfeldii*. The **subalpine dry heath community** occurs in exposed areas on Stac Pollaidh between 300 and 750m. Species in this community include heather, juniper *Juniperus communis*, wavy hair grass, cypress-leaved plait-moss, woolly fringe moss, dwarf tree lichen *Cladonia arbuscula*, and kidney lichen *Cladonia uncialis*.

Spring-head, rill & flush is a relatively rare habitat on the site, but can be found on the north side of Cùl Mòr. Blinks *Montia fontana* and yellow saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides* are characteristic plants found in this habitat. The nationally scarce bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* can also be found here. **Subalpine wet heath** occurs extensively across the site with some large areas on the slopes of Stac Pollaidh. Deergrass and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* dominate this habitat. Carnation sedge *Carex panicea* is common in some places.

Blanket bog

Inverpolly SSSI has the most extensive tracts of western blanket bog on an upland site in the UK. This habitat occurs on flat ground and on gentle slopes, and includes mosaics of pool systems. This type of blanket bog is dominated by deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Sundew *Drosera spp*, *Sphagnum* mosses and *Cladonia* lichens are characteristic species. Cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus* can be found in higher parts of the site.

Upland birch woodland

Birch-dominated woodland is spread widely across the site, including on some of the offshore islands. Downy and pendulous birch *Betula pubescens* and *B. pendula* are the most common species, along with rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, alder *Alnus glutinosa*, bird cherry *Prunus padus* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Sessile oak *Quercus petraea* is found in a few areas within the site.

The ground flora includes heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, common wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and mountain fern moss *Hylocomium splendens*. In more nutrient-rich areas, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, Alpine enchanter's nightshade *Circaea alpina*, melancholy thistle *Cirsium heterophyllum*, wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, globeflower *Trollius europaeus*, red campion *Silene dioica*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* can be found. A number of the birch woods are rich in mosses and liverworts that grow in relatively warm, wet areas close to the coast.

Norwegian mugwort (*Artemisia norvegica*)

Norwegian mugwort *Artemisia norvegica* is a nationally rare plant which grows on Cùl Mòr. Only two other colonies of Norwegian mugwort are known in the UK.

Beetle (*Otiorhynchus auropunctatus*)

The rare species of weevil *Otiorhynchus auropunctatus* was first recorded in the UK from Stac Pollaidh in 1964 at an altitude of just over 500m. It is often found at higher altitudes amongst dwarf shrubs and feeds on many species of plants.

Moths

Three nationally scarce or rare species of moth have been recorded on this site. These are the micromoth *Acrolepiopsis betulella*, the slender-striped rufous *Coenocalpe lapidata* and the broad-bordered white underwing *Anarta melanopa*.

Breeding bird assemblage

The large number of lochs together with the areas of blanket bog and wet heath attract a wide variety of birds that breed near lochs or streams. Red-throated diver, black-throated diver, heron, greylag goose, wigeon, teal, goldeneye, red-breasted merganser, snipe, curlew, greenshank, common sandpiper and grey wagtail all breed on this site.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1971

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 24 October 1986 with a 1090ha increase in area, (notification confirmed 16 July 1987 with a 9ha decrease in area).

Notification reviewed under 2004 Act: 31 March 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 11937.5ha).

Inverpolly SSSI is also designated as Inverpolly Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats and species listed below.

- Habitats :
- : Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds
 - : Acidic scree
 - : Alpine and subalpine heaths
 - : Blanket bog
 - : Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
 - : Depressions on peat substrates
 - : Dry heaths
 - : Montane acid grasslands
 - : Plants in crevices on acid rocks
 - : Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface
 - : Western acidic oak woodland
 - : Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath
- Species :
- : Freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)
 - : Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Several lochs within Inverpolly SSSI are part of the Inverpolly, Loch Urigill and nearby Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for the bird listed below.

- Birds :
- : Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), breeding

A small part of Inverpolly SSSI at Loch Veyatie overlaps with part of Cam Loch SSSI which is notified for Caledonian igneous, Moine and Quaternary of Scotland geology as well as oligotrophic loch and upland birch woodland.