



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 West Inverness-shire Lochs SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Black-throated diver	Favourable (2005)	SPA
Common scoter	Favourable (2005)	SPA

Description of the site

West Inverness-shire Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) comprises a grouping of eight freshwater lochs set largely in upland terrain to the west of the Great Glen in Inverness-shire, Lochaber and Skye and Lochalsh. The lochs involved are Lochs Affric, Bad an Losguinn, Blair, Cluanie, Garry, Loyne, Lundie and Poulary, together with a short stretch of the River Garry which links Lochs Poulary and Garry. They are between 90 and 340 metres above sea level and between 52 and 1118 hectares in size.

Most of the lochs are in a remote, upland area with few visitors. Angling takes place from both the shore and from boats. Lochs Affric, Blair, Lundie and Bad an Losguinn are semi-natural in character. Lochs Cluanie, Loyne and Garry are part of the Great Glen hydro-electric generation scheme and are dammed. There is commercial forestry adjoining some of the lochs, especially Lochs Garry, Loyne and Bad an Losguinn. Loch Cluanie, Loch Garry and Loch Poulary have a road running alongside their northern shores.

The SSSI boundary is coincident with that of West Inverness-shire Lochs Special Protection Area, which is classified for the same two species. Together, the eight lochs are therefore of both national and European Union importance for breeding black-throated divers and common scoter and in 2005 were considered to be in favourable condition. Between 1990 and 2005 the lochs supported an average of 6.6 pairs of black-throated divers, representing 4.2% of the British breeding population. The average productivity of diver chicks for the whole site is 0.22 chicks per territory per

monitored year. This apparently low figure is in fact not uncommon with black-throated divers and represents a realistic baseline for assessing the condition of the site in the future. Between 1994 and 2005 the lochs also supported an average of 7.8 pairs of common scoter, representing 8.2% of the British population. Numbers of scoters fluctuate annually and the maximum recorded has been 25 pairs.



Common scoter



Black-throated diver

Past and present management

Many of the lochs lie within upland estates where the emphasis is on traditional sporting management. Little active management of the lochs takes place, with the exception of water level controls for the hydro-electric generation associated with Lochs Cluanie, Loyne and Garry. Here artificial fluctuations in water levels can be quite pronounced. Floating rafts for black-throated divers to use as breeding platforms have recently been installed on Loch Cluanie in an attempt to protect their nest sites and improve their breeding success. Rafts have also been in place for a number of years on Loch Garry and on Loch Affric, where they have an established pattern of success.

Some sport angling takes place on several lochs during the summer months and there is a salmon smolt rearing installation at the eastern end of Loch Garry.

The catchment of several of the lochs supports extensive established commercial plantations.

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 the management.

Both black-throated divers and common scoters are shy birds which require low levels of disturbance and easy access to the loch shore, and in the case of scoters, the adjoining vegetation. Diver nests with eggs are particularly susceptible to water level

fluctuations which can either leave nests stranded or flood them. For raising chicks divers need good availability of freshwater invertebrates and small fish. Thus, it is important to maintain low levels of nutrients within the lochs.

The status of this site as a Special Protection Area under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives means that there is an obligation on Government to avoid deterioration in the status of the birds and their associated habitat as well as to avoid disturbance of the species for which the area has been designated.

To this end the objectives of management for this site are :

1. To maintain the populations of breeding black-throated divers and common scoters by avoiding significant disturbance.
2. To maintain, and if possible improve, diver chick productivity.
3. To maintain the existing extent of wetland habitats in a favourable condition by ensuring that current water levels and regulatory regimes are maintained.
4. To maintain an adequate food supply for black-throated divers by avoiding nutrient run off and pollution from the loch catchments.

Date last reviewed: 14 November 2007