



Scottish Natural Heritage

LOCH EYE
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 982

EAST HIGHLAND AREA
Fodderty Way
Dingwall Business Park
Dingwall
IV15 9XB

Tel: 01349 865333
Fax: 01349 865609
Email: EAST_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk

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.

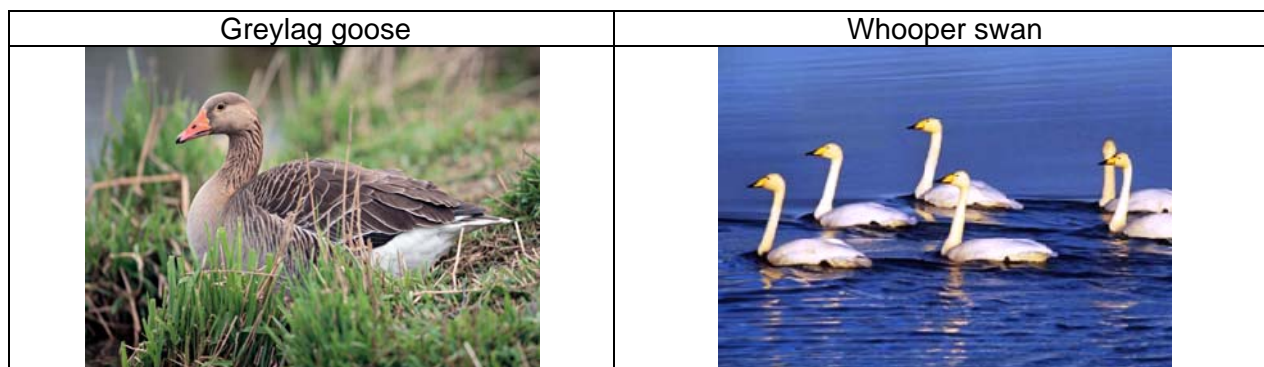
Description of the site

Loch Eye is a shallow loch (1-2m in depth and 2.5km long) located between the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths, approximately 4km east of Tain. The loch is surrounded by a narrow fringe of trees and fen and has a small, largely agricultural lowland catchment.

The SSSI consists of the loch and its immediate margins and is designated for its nutrient-rich open water habitat and aquatic plants. The chemistry of the water is such that plant communities characteristic of both nutrient-rich and nutrient-poor conditions are present. The loch has a profuse growth of aquatic plants which cover over 90% of the loch bottom. This includes at least twenty-four open water plant species and thirty-four edge species. Most notably ten pondweed species have been recorded, including the nationally rare Shetland pondweed, *Potamogeton rutilus*, the nationally scarce slender-leaved pondweed, *P. filiformis*, and a number of locally scarce species. Other open water species include the near threatened lesser water plantain, *Baldellia ranunculoides*, whilst edge species include the locally rare greater spearwort, *Ranunculus lingua*.

The loch is also designated for the large numbers of roosting Icelandic greylag geese and whooper swans which occur in winter. Between 1996/97 and 2000/01, an average of 1403 greylag geese occurred (over 1% of the UK population). Over the same period an average of 65 whooper swans (1% of UK population) roosted on the loch. The numbers of these species are of European and international importance and the site is therefore also classified as a Special Protection Area (SPA). The actual numbers of birds roosting on the loch fluctuate from year to year and with weather conditions.

The open water habitat was monitored in 2004 and was found to be in favourable condition.



Natural features of Loch Eye SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Eutrophic loch	Favourable, maintained (August 2004)	
Greylag goose, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Whooper swan, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (February 2001)	SPA

Past and present management

Historical records indicate that Loch Eye is on the site of a natural loch. However, several archaeological features now lie below the water level and the loch has probably been considerably modified over the centuries.

The loch provided the village of Fearn with its water supply until the 1950s and a small curling pond was constructed at the south-west end. The outflow from the loch is still managed by a sluice and some of the adjacent farms use the loch for watering cattle and occasionally for irrigation. There are only a few fences around the loch and livestock from the adjacent fields can easily gain access to the loch-side. .

Wildfowling has been carried out on this site in the past. In the 1960s and early 1970s concerns were raised about the level of associated damage caused to land adjacent to the loch and the level of disturbance to the bird populations. This resulted in the granting of the Loch Eye Bird Sanctuary Order in 1974. No shooting of wildfowl takes place within the SSSI at the present time.

Greylag geese and whooper swan both feed on fallen grain and winter crops in fields adjacent to the loch. This can cause serious agricultural damage and has resulted in nearby farmers applying to the Scottish Government for licences to shoot geese out of season in an attempt to scare them from important crops. These licences are usually issued but in practice few birds are shot and the roost on the loch itself is not disturbed.

The loch has been fished for many years and this is reflected in the large number of jetties and boat sheds around the shore. At various times over the last 50 years the loch has been stocked with brown trout to improve the fishing. Trout fishing continues and is managed by the Loch Eye Angling Association, which is a small club comprising the riparian owners and their guests. Their aim is to have good quality brown trout fishing based on a self-sustaining population. Only rowing boats are used on the loch.

Low-key recreational activities (e.g. windsurfing) sometimes take place on the loch in

summer but this is not considered to disturb or damage the notified features of this SSSI. Similarly, the site is used for bird watching and walking at levels which are compatible with the nature conservation of the site.

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 and monitor the effectiveness of the 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. To maintain the open water habitats and associated aquatic vegetation in favourable condition by, for example:

- Maintaining an appropriate water level regime
- Maintaining appropriate water quality and minimising nutrient inputs
- Managing boating and recreational uses (including angling)

2. To maintain conditions required to support important wintering populations of greylag goose and whooper swan by:

- Managing activities that may cause disturbance to wintering birds or damage to the supporting habitat

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The number of birds wintering at this site will depend on factors at the breeding grounds as well as on migration route. Furthermore the use of the loch by whooper swan is dependent on land use in fields close to the site as well as the winter weather.

The farmland surrounding Loch Eye is of high quality and intensively managed. Concerns have been expressed in the past that agricultural run-off, sewage effluent and other land use changes within the catchment area were leading to eutrophication (nutrient enrichment) of the loch. Research in 1991 indicated that the largest single contribution (up to 50%) of phosphorus into the loch was the faecal input from the population of wintering waterfowl. The nature of the loch makes it vulnerable to nutrient enrichment and serious algal “blooms” occurred in the late 1980’s/early1990’s causing dying back of some aquatic plants in 1994. There have been signs of continuing improvement since then.

Date last reviewed: 1 December 2010