

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT UPPER LOUGH ERNE - BELLEISLE, COUNTY FERMANAGH. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area delineated and described on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora and fauna and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle area of special scientific interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of the flora and fauna. It encompasses the northern part of Upper Lough Erne and includes the open waters of the lough, in addition to a range of associated wetland and other communities within the adjoining drumlin landscape. The Belleisle area is characterised by the extent of its open water and swamp communities, and by its wooded islands. In addition, there are areas of traditionally-managed grasslands, which are rich in plant species. There is a diverse range of plant and animal communities, with continuous transitions from open water to drier ground and important concentrations of both individual species and groups of species.

The open waters of the main lough and smaller satellite loughs contain a variety of aquatic species, including Yellow Water-lily Nuphar lutea, and a number of Pondweeds, such as Broad-leaved Pondweed Potamogeton natans, Blunt-leaved Pondweed P. obtusifolius and Shining Pondweed P. lucens.

Depending on the degree of exposure to wind and wave action, in many places the open waters give way to a swamp zone, which is dominated by the dense growth of tall grass and grass-like species such as Common Reed Phragmites australis and Common Club-rush Schoenoplectus lacustris. This is particularly well-developed within the sheltered bays and inlets of the area. Exposed shores tend to have more open swamp communities, with Water Horsetail Equisetum fluviatile and Common Spike-rush Eleocharis palustris prominent.

Behind the swamp zone is an area of fen, where sedges are the main component of the vegetation, particularly Tufted-sedge Carex elata and Bottle Sedge C. rostrata. This zone is frequently species-rich, with a wide range of associated herbs, including such scarce species as Cowbane Cicuta virosa, Greater Water-parsnip Sium latifolium and Flowering-rush Butomus umbellatus, in addition to more common plants like Water-plantain Alisma plantago-aquatica and Purple Loosestrife Lythrum salicaria.

In many places where the shoreline is grazed, there is a transition to wet grassland, which is very variable in species content. In general, grasses and rushes are dominant here, especially Creeping Bent Agrostis stolonifera, Soft Rush Juncus effusus and Hard Rush J. inflexus, with a range of herbs such as Creeping-Jenny Lysimachia nummularia, Marsh Pennywort Hydrocotyle vulgaris, Lesser Spearwort Ranunculus flammula and Creeping Buttercup R. repens. Where flushing by more base-rich waters occurs, a sward dominated by sedges such as Glaucous Sedge Carex flacca and Carnation Sedge C. panicea is found. Important concentrations of species-rich grassland communities have developed where

traditional farming methods, such as hay-making, have been maintained. Although Sharp-flowered Rush Juncus acutiflorus is generally the dominant species, these meadows can be very rich in associated herbs and sedges. There are also communities in which Meadow Thistle Cirsium dissectum is prominent.

Wet woodland is found where the shoreline is ungrazed or only very lightly grazed. The woodland has a canopy in which species such as Willow Salix spp. and Alder Alnus glutinosa are dominant, with other species such as Spindle Euonymus europaeus and Guelder-rose Viburnum opulus scattered throughout. Buckthorn Rhamnus cathartica is frequent in the area, although it is a scarce plant in Northern Ireland. The ground flora beneath this generally resembles that of the swamp and fen zone. Areas of drier woodland are found on many of the islands in the lough. These contain mature stands of mixed deciduous species, including Sessile Oak Quercus petraea, Ash Fraxinus excelsior and Downy Birch Betula pubescens. In places there is a well-developed understorey with shrubs such as Hawthorn Crataegus monogyna, Hazel Corylus avellana and Holly Ilex aquifolium. The ground flora is very variable, ranging from grass-dominated swards, with species like Giant Fescue Festuca gigantea and False Brome Brachypodium sylvaticum, to more typical woodland herbs such as Wood Avens Geum urbanum, Enchanter's-nightshade Circaea lutetiana, Herb-Robert Geranium robertianum, Sanicle Sanicula europaea, Primrose Primula vulgaris, Wood-sorrel Oxalis acetosella and Common Dog-violet Viola riviniana.

The area contains many vascular plants with a restricted distribution in the British Isles. In addition to some of those listed above, rare plants include Arrowhead Sagittaria sagittifolia in the open water, Narrow-leaved Water-plantain Alisma lanceolatum, Marsh Pea Lathyrus palustris, Marsh Stitchwort Stellaria palustris, Greater Spearwort Ranunculus lingua and Needle Spike-rush Eleocharis acicularis in the swamp and fen, and Fen Violet Viola persicifolia and Northern Bedstraw Galium boreale on more exposed rocky shores.

Otters Lutra lutra are known to frequent the area.

Belleisle contains significant numbers of bird species. In summer, its wet grasslands support numbers of breeding waders, including Snipe Gallinago gallinago, Lapwing Vanellus vanellus, Redshank Tringa totanus and Curlew Numenius arquata. The most notable areas are at Inishcreenry and Lusty Beg. Overwintering birds include Whooper Swan Cygnus cygnus, Mute Swan C. olor, Great Crested Grebe Podiceps cristatus and Goldeneye Bucephala clangula. Greenland White-fronted Geese Anser albifrons flavirostris have recently been recorded from the area.

Although still relatively poorly known, the invertebrate communities of the Upper Lough Erne basin are notable. As the main body of Upper Lough Erne and many of the satellite lakes are eutrophic, the aquatic fauna is frequently dominated by common lowland species. However, whilst individual areas may be relatively species-poor, the fauna of the complete system is rich and varied. Amongst the better known groups, there are records of over 70 species of water beetle, 20 species of aquatic Hemiptera and 14 species of dragonfly. A number of these species are found most commonly within Northern Ireland in the Upper Lough Erne area.

Species typical of the open water on exposed shores include the bug Velia caprai, the beetles Laccobius striatulus and Orectochilus villosus, and the Swan Mussel Anodonta cygnea, which can be very abundant here in what is the centre of its distribution in Northern Ireland. Another species typical of these areas and also virtually unknown outside the Erne basin in Northern Ireland, is the aquatic bug Micronecta poweri. On open, lightly grazed grassland behind these stony shores, saldid bugs and ground beetles are frequent, including the uncommon species Saldula opacula and Pelophila borealis.

In sheltered areas where there are stands of open swamp and fen vegetation, a more diverse aquatic fauna is found, with several notable species. Surface-living aquatic insects such as whirligig beetles and pondskaters are frequent in these areas. The most common whirligigs are often Gyrinus paykulli and Gyrinus distinctus, two species which are very rare throughout most of Britain and Ireland. The presence of the gerrid Limnoporus rufoscutellatus is also significant, as this has rarely been recorded before in Ireland. Other notable aquatic insects recorded in the Upper Lough Erne system are the beetles Hygrotus quinquelineatus, which is characteristic of the large base-rich lakes in Ireland, Noterus crassicornis and Coelambus impressopunctatus and the Hairy Dragonfly Brachytron pratense, for which this area is its Northern Ireland stronghold.

Information is especially scanty for terrestrial groups which depend upon the marginal habitats. However, there are indications that the unimproved meadows are especially rich in ground beetles, with several notable species including the ground beetle Carabus clatratus. Likewise the fauna of the scrub and woodland is largely undocumented. One species for which this habitat is known to be important is the Brimstone butterfly Gonepteryx rhamni. Buckthorn Rhamnus cathartica is the larval foodplant for this butterfly, which establishes breeding populations periodically throughout Upper Lough Erne.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area:

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including sand, gravel and peat.
2. Any change in the present annual pattern and intensity of grazing, including any change in the type of livestock used or in supplementary feeding practice.
3. Any change in the established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.

- (ii) Research activities;
- (iii) Recreational activities;
- (iv) Exercising of animals.

16. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 27 February, 1995



J CROWTHER

Assistant Secretary

Sharon McMillan

Civil Servant

Both of Clarence Court

Belfast

FOOTNOTES

- (a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the above operations or activities does not constitute planning permission. Where required, planning permission must be applied for in the usual manner to the Department under Part IV of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.

- (b) Also note that many of the operations and activities listed above are capable of being carried out either on a large scale or in a very small way. While it is impossible to define exactly what is "large" and what is "small", the Department would intend to approach each case in a common sense and practical way. It is very unlikely that small scale operations would give rise for concern and if this was the case the Department would give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.

UPPER LOUGH ERNE – BELLEISLE

Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

A statement of Environment and Heritage Service's views about the management of Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of Environment and Heritage Service about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Environment and Heritage Service has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of Environment and Heritage Service is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 3 - 5 for a list of these operations and activities). Environment and Heritage Service welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Natural eutrophic lake

Natural eutrophic lakes have nutrient levels that are higher than those of other types of lakes. As a result of this natural productivity, they are typically species-rich and represent important habitats for wildlife. In their natural state, they are characterised by a rich mixture of aquatic plants. However, many such lakes have been damaged by over-enrichment with nutrients which can lead to a reduction in species-richness. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the habitat and its associated species. These include important invertebrate communities and Otter populations.

Lakes depend on water quantity and quality to maintain their conservation value. They are generally sensitive to disturbance and nutrient enrichment. Sympathetic management practices and recreation around Upper Lough Erne – Belleisle have contributed to maintaining this feature of interest.



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Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where possible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sympathetic management of water levels to maintain the most favourable water depths throughout the year for the plant and animal species present.

Low intensity agriculture around the ASSI has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of this feature of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of these practices to ensure that disturbance to the waters, bed and shore of the lakes and their wildlife is minimised.

Environment and Heritage Service recognises the important economic and social roles of fishing and welcomes sustainable fishery management that is sensitive to the special interests of the ASSI.

Woodland

Oakwood and Wet Woodland are important habitats for wildlife. They provide food and shelter for a wide variety of mammals, birds and invertebrates.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the woodland through the development of its structure and the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and mammal species, including the Otter.

Specific objectives include:

Encourage the woodland to become more "mature" by avoiding disturbance. The structure of the wood will gradually become more diverse, with well-developed canopy, shrub and ground layers, and an abundance of species like Ivy, mosses, liverworts and lichens that live on the trees themselves.

Encourage the retention of dead wood both on the woodland floor and still standing in the canopy. Dead wood is a very important habitat for some of the less conspicuous woodland species, such as fungi and invertebrates.

Encourage regeneration of woodland and discourage damage to trees and shrubs through the control of grazing. In general, natural regeneration is preferable to planting.

Increases in the nutrient status of the water and underlying peat soils can lead to a decline in some of the more valuable plant communities. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where necessary, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the wood from drying out.

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures are species-rich wet grasslands that represent an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and important invertebrate communities.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, grassland generally needs some management to retain its interest. Although occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, in the absence of management, coarse grasses can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant.

Grazing by cattle is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain open areas and a diverse sward structure, although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Where cutting for hay, followed by light aftermath cattle grazing, has been traditionally practised this is also an effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain a species-rich sward.

Specific objectives include:

Where low intensity grazing has been practised this has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Where cutting for hay followed by light aftermath cattle grazing is traditionally practised this has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the species-rich grassland by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive grassland species through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the grassland from drying out.

Fens and Swamps

Fens and swamps are important habitats for wildlife. They develop on the fringes of open water and represent a stage in the process of succession from open water to dry land. Swamps often consist of a single dominant plant species (such as reeds, sedges, or

bulrushes) with a few other plants growing amongst them whilst fens are often very diverse and rich in species. Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle ASSI contains a number of different fen and swamp vegetation communities. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the fen and swamp through the conservation of these communities and their associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and Otters.

Fen vegetation requires water levels to be at, or just below, the surface all year round, while swamps generally occur in slightly deeper water. Increases in the nutrient status of the water and underlying peat soils can lead to the dominance of species such as Bulrush at the expense of other, more important plant communities. Therefore it is important to maintain good water-quality.

Fen and swamp communities are susceptible to successional change and generally need some management to retain their interest. In the absence of management, coarse grasses such as Common Reed can quickly spread from the swamp into the fen and ultimately woody species may become dominant. Over a period of time, these species may shade out more important plant communities and cause the fen to dry out. Occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, but widespread conversion of fen and swamp to wet woodland would generally be undesirable.

Low intensity summer grazing by cattle (or ponies) that are more adaptable to wet conditions is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain species-rich fen vegetation and a diverse sward structure. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Where appropriate, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the vegetation from drying out.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the grazing of fen and swamp although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. Where grazing is not possible, other management practices such as cutting may be used.

In general, the control of scrub within fen and swamp communities can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases additional scrub control may be required.

Breeding waders

Grasslands at Inishcreenry and Lusty Beg are important sites for their breeding waders including Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank. Such sites have become scarce overall in Northern Ireland. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure appropriate management of the area for breeding waders, taking into account vegetation structure, grazing levels, soil moisture and predators.

Less intensively managed grasslands are an important habitat for breeding waders. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of such grasslands for their breeding waders.

Appropriate grazing by cattle is the most effective way of maintaining the sward structure in a state suitable for breeding waders. However, overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching and nests may be trampled. Where grazing is not feasible, cutting of the vegetation is desirable provided this is done outside the wader breeding season.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continued practice of grazing these grasslands in a manner that encourages breeding waders.

Sward height is important in determining which species of wader will make use of the area, with longer vegetation attracting Snipe and short being suitable for Lapwing. Use of fertiliser should be discouraged, as this can increase early season grass growth, thus reducing the suitability of the site for waders such as Lapwing, which prefer shorter swards. Such use also means livestock could move onto the land early, at high stocking rates, which would increase the risk of trampling of nests.

Maintain the structure of the site through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the grassland from drying out.

The breeding productivity of ground nesting waders can be reduced by the presence of tall hedges, mature trees or encroaching scrub in the immediate vicinity of the nest site as they provide lookouts and nest sites for predators such as Hooded Crow. Limited scrub and tree management may be required as appropriate.

Wintering Waterbirds

Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle ASSI is a wintering site for large numbers of migratory waterbirds. As part of the Upper Lough Erne system it supports an internationally important population of Whooper Swan and numbers of Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and Coot that are significant in an all-Ireland context.

Swans, geese and ducks are attracted by a rich food supply and secure roost sites. Wildfowl make use of both open water and surrounding open habitats, particularly wet grassland, for feeding. Aquatic vegetation and invertebrates are important food sources for many ducks while swans, geese and some ducks obtain a proportion of their food on land. The quality of feeding areas is, however, susceptible to the influence of operations undertaken both within and outside the ASSI that may result in pollution or

changes in water quality or unacceptable levels of disturbance to feeding birds. It is therefore important that damaging practices are minimised around the ASSI.

Secure roost sites, free from disturbance, are essential to allow the birds to conserve energy when not feeding. Some of these roosts may lie outside the ASSI. Undisturbed roosts are particularly important during severe winter weather. Wildfowl usually roost on open water. The variety of habitats present within the ASSI should be managed in order to safeguard the wintering waterbird population.

Specific objectives include:

Feeding habitats – it is important to maintain the quality and extent of habitat used for feeding by the birds in particular the open water and surrounding reedbeds, fen and grassland where present.

Disturbance around known roost sites and frequently used feeding areas should be minimised.

Heronry

Creaghmacwallen Island, within the Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle ASSI, holds one of the largest heronries in Northern Ireland. Grey Herons nest in groups high in the crowns of mature trees. This species requires suitable woodland structure (essentially mature trees of either native or non-native species) and quiet and undisturbed places in which to nest, usually preferring a commanding position over the surrounding open landscape together with adjoining or nearby wetlands in which to feed.

Specific objectives include:

Management should aim to maintain areas of woodland with a high proportion of tall mature trees (typically between 15-30m high) to provide suitable roosting and nesting sites for the species.

Nesting Grey Herons are vulnerable to human disturbance and the disturbance of woodland in the immediate vicinity of nesting birds should be kept to a minimum during the breeding season (February to July). Recreational use of the woodland should be discouraged whilst shooting for game or vermin species should be avoided completely in these areas when Grey Herons are nesting.

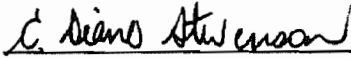
Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage all activities associated with site maintenance, management, access and recreation to be undertaken in a sensitive manner that ensures disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the main habitats, such as hedges and scrub, through sensitive management. These adjoining

habitats can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.



E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the *23RD* of *JANUARY* 2008

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
UPPER LOUGH ERNE - BELLEISLE AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC
INTEREST

MAP REFERRED TO IN THE
DECLARATION DATED: 27 February, 1995

SITE BOUNDARY: The Area of Special Scientific Interest
(ASSI) includes all lands, waters and islands within the
solid black line, and the areas surrounded by a solid
black line indicated by the letters A and B. The ASSI
does not include the areas indicated by arrows and
lettered U, V, W, X, Y and Z on the map.

AREA OF SITE: 1370 ha (including water)

SCALE: 1: 10,000

SHEET NOS: 230, 244, 245

IRISH GRID REFERENCE: H285330

DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA: Fermanagh

COUNTY: Fermanagh

J. Crowther
J CROWTHER
Assistant Secretary

Please Note: This is a reduction of the original
1:10,000 scale map. The scale is now approximately
1:30,000. For the purpose of clarity the boundary line
has been strengthened and thus may not show the boundary
line in such fine detail as on the 1:10,000 map.

S071/NM1

