

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT GARRON PLATEAU, COUNTY ANTRIM. 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, fauna, geological and physiographical features and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Garron Plateau area of special scientific interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its geology and peatland flora and fauna. Geological interest relates to the occurrence of a successional sequence from dark, coarse olivine basalts below, to flow banded finer grained olivine porphyritic basalts above, and by the presence of a picrite-dolerite plug formation at Trosk, which is unique in Ireland. All of these features occur within the Upper Basalt Formation. A five metre thick pillow lava/hyaloclastite deposit is also present.

The Garron is the largest area of intact blanket bog in Northern Ireland. The peatland complex is comprised of a series of raised and flushed peat bog units, and a number of oligotrophic water bodies, all within an enveloping blanket bog peat mantle. The peatland supports an array of associated floral and faunal communities, which include a number of rare and notable plant and animal species, and a diverse upland breeding bird population.

The peatland exhibits a number of notable structural features such as large, well developed hummock and lawn complexes, pool complexes and eroding hagg complexes, in addition to quaking bogs and saddle mires. The general bog vegetation is characterised by Sphagnum mosses, ericoid dwarf-shrubs and sedges, with the composition and abundance of these components dependent on local edaphic conditions. Flat water-logged ground is characterised by the prominence of such species as Cross-leaved Heath Erica tetralix, Bog Asphodel Narthecium ossifragum and Common Cottongrass Eriophorum angustifolium, over a lush Sphagnum moss carpet, while on more freely-draining slopes Heather Calluna vulgaris, Crowberry Empetrum nigrum and Hare's-tail Cottongrass Eriophorum vaginatum are more typical. The occurrence of weak flushing by the movement of water through the bog is indicated by the presence of scattered Purple Moor-grass Molinia caerulea or Bottle Sedge Carex rostrata. When this flushing is concentrated into localised runnels, the vegetation is characterised by small sedge communities, in which species such as Carnation Sedge C. panicea, Yellow-sedge C. viridula, Glaucous Sedge C. flacca and Tawny Sedge C. hostiana are prominent.

The site is rich in rare and notable plants including Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid Dactylorhiza traunsteineri, Bog Orchid Hammarbva paludosa, Marsh Saxifrage Saxifraga hirculus, Few-flowered Sedge Carex pauciflora, both Bog-sedge C. limosa and Tall Bog-sedge Carex magellanica, Parsley Fern Cryptogramma crispa, Oak Fern Gymnocarpium dryopteris, Beech Fern Phegopteris connectilis, Alpine Clubmoss Diphasiastrum alpinum and the bryophytes Sphagnum imbricatum and S. fuscum.

Several types of upland and base-poor lakes occur on the plateau. The most common lake types are characterised either by the association of Yellow Water-lily Nuphar lutea with White Water-lily Nymphaea alba, or by an association in

which Water Lobelia Lobelia dortmannia is prominent. Loughnatrosk is a mid altitude lake, distinguished by an association of Water Lobelia Lobelia dortmannia growing with the aquatic moss Fontinalis antipyretica and contains the rare Opposite-leaved Pondweed Groenlandia densa. The marginal lake vegetation around most of the lakes tends to be sparse, consisting of a scattered swamp and poor acid fen fringe.

The site is home to a wide variety of insects including the rare ground beetle Bembidion geniculatum, which is recorded for only one other location in Ireland. Notable water beetles include the northern boreal species Hydroporus morio, Stictotarsus griseostriatus, Agabus arcticus and Dytiscus lapponicus. The local aquatic bug Glaenocoris propinqua also occurs at several sites. Other insects of note include the Large Heath Butterfly Coenonympha tullia.

A large breeding population of Red Grouse Lagopus lagopus is found on the plateau, along with a few pairs of Golden Plover Pluvialis apricaria and Dunlin Calidris alpina, while Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos are a frequent summer resident. The plateau also provides a good hunting ground for Merlin Falco columbarius, Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus and to a lesser degree Buzzard Buteo buteo and Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus, while Ravens Corvus corax are frequently found scavenging on carrion.

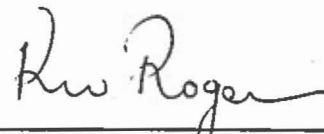
SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features of the area:-

1. Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating or re-seeding.
2. Increase in grazing intensity or change either in the type of livestock used or in feeding practices.
3. Introduction of mowing or other methods of cutting vegetation.
4. Application of manure, slurry, fertiliser or lime.
5. Application of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill, selectively or non-selectively, any form of animal, plant or other living organism.
6. Dumping, spreading or discharge of any matter.
7. Burning.
8. The release into the area of any wild, feral or domestic animal, plant or seed. "Animal" includes any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish or invertebrate, but excludes livestock and animals used in controlling livestock.
9. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, or the disturbance, killing or removal of any wild animal in a manner likely to affect the continued existence of the species within the area except as provided for under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
10. The introduction of tree or woodland management, including afforestation or planting.
11. Drainage, including peat drainage or the use of mole, tile, tunnel or other artificial drains.

12. Modification of the structure of water courses, including their banks and beds as by realignment, regrading or dredging.
13. Management of aquatic and bank vegetation.
14. The alteration of water levels or water tables or the utilisation of water including storage or extraction, but excluding water used for domestic requirements.
15. Infilling of ditches, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or lakes.
16. Reclamation of land from bog, marsh, river or lake.
17. Extraction of minerals including peat, sand, gravel, topsoil or subsoil.
18. Construction, removal or destruction of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstandings, banks, ditches and other earth works or the laying or removal of pipelines or cables, above or below ground.
19. Storage of materials.
20. Use of craft or vehicles likely to damage the vegetation.
21. Erection of permanent or temporary structures or the undertaking of building, engineering or other operations, including drilling.
22. Recreational, educational or research activities likely to damage the vegetation.
23. Changes in game management.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 31 May, 1994



R W ROGERS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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FOOTNOTES

- (a) Please note the 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 (NI) 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.

GARRON PLATEAU

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 Garron Plateau 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 2 and 3 of the attached Document B 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

Blanket Bog

Blanket bog is a unique habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the bog through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. The latter includes important invertebrate communities.

Bogs depend on rainwater and maintaining a high water table is vital to the "health" of the bog. In addition, the peat soils and many of the species that grow there are very sensitive to physical disturbance.

Specific objectives include:

Ensure that the blanket bog is not burnt in order to prevent the loss of more specialised plants and animals and to avoid damage to peat soils which could lead to erosion.

Where appropriate, prevent the loss of light-demanding peatland species through the control of scrub and trees.

Where the surface is not too wet blanket bogs can sustain very light levels of grazing by sheep. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a regime that avoids overgrazing or poaching.

Where the habitat has been subjected to heavy grazing, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a reduction in stocking density to allow the bog to recover.

Flush and spring fens

Flush and spring fens are an important habitat for wildlife. They occur where groundwater reaches the soil surface, either as gentle seepages, which give rise to flushes, or through greater flows that are evident as springs. Stands of the habitat tend to be small in extent, but the Garron Plateau is notable for the number of such flushes, which are widely scattered through the blanket bog and heath, and also for the number of rare plants that are found in the habitat, including Marsh Saxifrage. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of these flushes through the conservation of the associated native plants and animals, including invertebrates.

The quantity and quality of the groundwater must be maintained as the flush and spring-fed fens are reliant on these sources of water. The application of pesticides, including herbicides, or any fertiliser would be damaging and should be avoided.

Flush and spring-fed fens are characterised by short sedge-rich vegetation. Light grazing is the most effective way to keep the vegetation open around springs and flushes and to avoid excessive damage. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure that sources of groundwater are safeguarded.

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

Wet and Dry Heath

Wet and dry heaths are also important habitats for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the heath through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Most heathland communities need some management to retain their interest. Small patches of scrub within heathland are valuable in providing additional habitat niches but in the absence of management, woody species can quickly take over. On the other

hand, too much grazing, especially through the winter, can cause heathers to be replaced by coarse grasses. Shepherding can help to spread grazing pressure over a wider area while fencing may also be useful in some areas to control stock numbers and movement.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the heathland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Where the habitat has been subjected to heavy grazing, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a reduction in stocking density to allow the heath to recover. Shepherding and fencing to control the movement of stock may also be beneficial in some situations.

Where burning is considered appropriate, it should only be undertaken after close consultation with, and the agreement of, Environment and Heritage Service. Burning can cause the loss of more specialised plants and animals, and may damage the peat soils, leading to erosion.

Prevent the loss of light-demanding heathland species through the control of scrub and bracken. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Lakes and Pools

Upland, nutrient-poor (Oligotrophic and Dystrophic) lakes and pools are again important habitats for wildlife, and are particularly well-represented on the Garron Plateau, where there are many upland lakes as well as several bog pool systems. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of these lakes and pools through the conservation of their associated native plants and animals. These include rare plants and important invertebrate communities.

Oligotrophic and Dystrophic lakes and pools 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 the Garron Plateau have contributed to maintaining this feature of interest.

Specific objectives include:

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

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of natural water levels.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of sympathetic management practices to ensure that disturbance to the waters, and also the bed and shore of the lakes and pools 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 lakes and pools.

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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the habitats by ensuring that there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

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

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 grassland and inland rock communities, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats are important for wildlife, especially rare plants.

Breeding Hen Harrier and Merlin

Garron Plateau ASSI supports important numbers of breeding Hen Harrier and Merlin. These are among the UK's rarest birds of prey. Numbers of both species have declined in Great Britain and much of Ireland as a result of habitat loss and persecution.

Hen Harriers and Merlins prey mainly on small birds such as Meadow Pipit and Skylark and breeding pairs may range over an area of up to 20km² to obtain sufficient food to rear chicks. Most foraging is carried out over heather moorland or unimproved grassland. The nests of Hen Harriers are usually located in deep heather within the ASSI but a range of habitats associated with adjoining forestry areas are also used. Merlins will also nest on the ground among deep heather but most currently utilise abandoned crows' nests on the edge of forestry plantations and use the ASSI principally for foraging. Breeding Hen Harrier and Merlin are very susceptible to disturbance around the nest. In winter several Hen Harriers may roost together at traditional sites in tall heather or forest.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance or enhancement of peatland habitats used by Hen Harrier and Merlin for breeding and foraging.

Specific objectives include:

Hen Harrier and Merlin depend upon a diverse vegetation structure, with areas of tall heather for nest sites and shorter Heather with a high density of the prey species. In most cases light grazing of the peatland habitats (blanket bog, dry heath and wet heath) will produce the desired structure. Overgrazing is likely to be detrimental.

Areas of unimproved grassland should be maintained as important habitat for Meadow Pipit and Skylark – the two commonest prey species for both Hen Harrier and Merlin.

Breeding Hen Harrier and Merlin are very vulnerable to disturbance within the general area of the nest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage actions that minimise disturbance to both these species when breeding.

The Geological series

Earth science features provide information about a region's geological history and can also aid interpretation of geological processes in the past and present.

The earth science interest at Garron Plateau occurs as an exposure of Palaeogene (Tertiary) lavas at Trosk. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.

Provided no damaging activities, as set out in the Schedule (pages 2 and 3), are undertaken without consent, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met.

Earth science features such as those at Garron Plateau may require occasional management intervention, in order to maintain access to and exposure of the geology. This could include, for example, selective removal of vegetation or any major build up of loose rock.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological series in an undamaged state.

Maintain access to the geological series.



E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the *1st* of *FEBRUARY* 2008