



Scottish Natural Heritage

**NORTHERN CORRIES, CAIRNGORMS**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 1243

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA**

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**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**

The Northern Corries, Cairngorms Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) has been notified for its mosaic of upland habitats including native pinewoods, bog woodland and juniper scrub. The altitudinal sequence of semi natural vegetation from pinewood habitats through a range of heaths and mires to arctic-alpine communities is exceptional. The evolving natural treeline and subalpine scrub is of particular interest. The site has twenty nationally scarce species of flowering plants and is notified for its assemblages of flowering plants and breeding birds

Quaternary landforms (those associated with the Ice Age) include corries, arêtes, moraines, melt-water channels and other smaller features such as boulder lobes. Those in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms are an integral part of the suite of earth science features for which the Cairngorms is internationally important and are another reason for notification as an SSSI.

The Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI is also a component part of a larger Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The following Natura qualifying habitats are significant for this SSSI: Caledonian forest, bog woodland, blanket bog, heaths (wet, dry and alpine), montane acid grasslands, plants in crevices on acid rocks, acidic scree, clear-water lakes or lochs, high altitude plant communities, juniper, tall herb

communities, very wet mires and otters. Other qualifying interests of the Cairngorms SAC are absent or occur rarely in the SSSI.

The Allt Mor has sources in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms and is a tributary of the River Spey. A few hundred metres of the river within the site, are included in the River Spey SAC which is designated for its salmon, sea lamprey, otter and freshwater pearl mussel populations. However, only otter and salmon are likely to occur within the Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI boundary.

The SSSI is also part of Cairngorms Special Protection Area (SPA) which has been designated for its populations of Scottish crossbill, golden eagle, dotterel, capercaillie, merlin and peregrine. With the exception of golden eagle, which includes part of the site within a home range, all species breed in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI.

#### Condition of SSSI features

The breeding bird species, scrub, vascular plant assemblage, upland assemblage and Quaternary of Scotland features were all monitored between 2001 and 2004 and found to be in favourable condition. There are monitoring results available for the scrub feature.

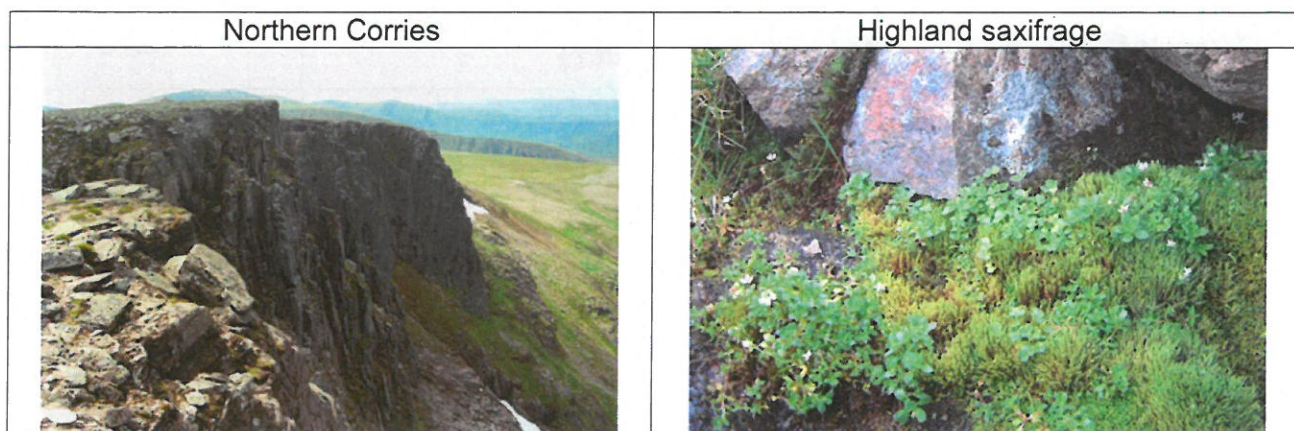
#### Condition of the overlapping Natura features

Dotterel, golden eagle, osprey, peregrine are all features of the Cairngorms SPA of which Northern Corries, Cairngorms is a component and these were all found to be in favourable condition when monitored during 1999 and 2003. No assessments are available for capercaillie, merlin and Scottish crossbill.

For the Cairngorms SAC as a whole, the following features were considered to be in favourable condition when monitored during 2002 and 2004: acidic scree, bog woodland, clear-water lakes or lochs, very wet mires, plants in crevices on acid rocks, and otters. In 2007, juniper, and tall herb communities were also found to be in favourable condition.

The same cycle of monitoring during 2007 of the Cairngorms SAC, found the following features to be in unfavourable condition; Caledonian forest, blanket bog, heaths (wet, dry, alpine and subalpine), montane acid grasslands and high altitude plant communities. They failed primarily due to over grazing and associated natural damage. However, it should be noted that the sample points for this work, may lie outwith this SSSI.

In relation to the River Spey SAC otters were found to be in favourable condition when monitored in 2004. However, Atlantic salmon were found to be in unfavourable but recovering condition when monitored during 2004, because there are less than the Scottish average of juvenile salmon present and the autumn component of the adult population has declined since the site was first designated.



<b>Natural features of Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable – maintained (June 2003)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable – maintained (May 2000)	SPA
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable – maintained (August 2002)	
Scrub	Favourable – maintained (July 2008)	
Upland assemblage	Favourable – maintained (September 2004)	SAC

<b>Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b> * asterisk denotes present on SSSI	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>SPA or SAC</b>
Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds	Favourable – maintained (July 2004)	SAC
Acidic scree*	Favourable – maintained (May 2007)	SAC
Alpine and sub alpine heaths*	Unfavourable – no change (May 2007)	SAC
Blanket bog*	Unfavourable – no change (May 2007)	SAC
Bog woodland*	Favourable – maintained (September 2002)	SAC
Caledonian forest*	Unfavourable – no change (November 2002)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels*	Favourable – maintained (July 2004)	SAC

Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Dry heaths*	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Hard-water springs depositing lime	Favourable - maintained (May 2007)	SAC
High-altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage*	Unfavourable – no change (May 2007)	SAC
Juniper on heaths or calcareous grassland*	Favourable - maintained (May 2007)	SAC
Montane acid grasslands*	Unfavourable - recovering (May 2007)	SAC
Mountain willow scrub	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Plants in crevices on acid rocks*	Favourable - maintained (May 2007)	SAC
Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Tall herb communities*	Favourable - maintained (May 2007)	SAC
Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface*	Favourable - maintained (May 2007)	SAC
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath*	Unfavourable - no change (May 2007)	SAC
Atlantic salmon*	Unfavourable - recovering (October 2004).	SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel	Unfavourable - recovering (October 2000)	SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable – maintained (September 2002)	SAC
Green shield-moss	Favourable - maintained (January 2003)	SAC
Otter*	Favourable – maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Capercaillie*	No monitoring results available	SPA
Dotterel*	Favourable - maintained (August 1999)	SPA
Golden eagle*	Favourable – maintained (August 2003)	SPA

Merlin*	No monitoring results available	SPA
Osprey*	Favourable – maintained (June 2003)	SPA
Peregrine*	Favourable – maintained (June 2002)	SPA
Scottish crossbill*	Not yet monitored	SPA

### **Past and present management**

Traditionally this area was deer forest and sporting estate with woodland on the lower slopes. In recent decades the principle land uses have been outdoor recreation and nature conservation.

The SSSI is flanked on its eastern side by the Cairn Gorm Ski Area with a car park at 620m. This facility attracts significant numbers of visitors and is the main point of access for all visitors. The cliffs on the designated site are extremely popular for winter climbing and, in suitable conditions, the Northern Corries are also popular with cross country skiers. This is one of the most popular areas in Scotland for training in a variety of mountain based activities. The site is popular with walkers and birdwatchers at all times of the year and many visitors are part of organised groups.

Management of recreational activity in the site is principally carried out by the owners of the site and the operators of the adjacent Mountain Area (in co-operation with SNH). Significant programmes of upland path repair and management have been carried out in recent years and a Ranger service is present.

Red and roe deer are still shot though in recent years numbers are low and this is now carried out as part of woodland management. The woodlands are managed primarily for nature conservation under a minimum-intervention regime and natural regeneration is widespread.

There is a resident herd of domestic reindeer on the site. Part of this herd is kept in a large fenced enclosure at the north of the SSSI for part of the year whilst others roam considerable distances throughout the site. The herd is an important visitor attraction with daily guided visits to the enclosure:

The area of Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI owned by FCS, was declared a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 2007; part of the Glenmore Forest NNR. The designation provides additional opportunities for awareness raising and enjoyment of the sites special qualities and management.

**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 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.

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 geomorphological features in favourable condition.
2. To maintain the extent and condition of bog woodland, Caledonian pinewood and upland habitats (alpine heath, alpine summit communities, blanket bog, moss, dwarf-herb and grass-dominated snow-beds, siliceous rocky slope, siliceous scree, subalpine dry dwarf-shrub heath, spring-head, rill and flush, wet heath).
3. To maintain the extent and condition of montane scrub habitats and encourage the further development by appropriate management, particularly control of deer.
4. To maintain conditions required to support the bird assemblage and vascular plant assemblages.
5. To avoid deterioration (and disturbance) of the qualifying Natura habitats (or those supporting Natura species) thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for each of the qualifying features.

To achieve the above, key management activities will be:

- Managing levels of grazing and trampling by grazing animals.
- Maintaining a network of footpaths to facilitate access to key areas and minimise the impacts of erosion and damage.
- Promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and responsible use to users of the site through on site and offsite interpretation.

### **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

The continuing vulnerable state of the Scottish capercaillie population is a significant factor affecting future management of this site. Further positive management for this species is likely but viable populations require larger areas of suitable habitat than exist on this site. Management of areas outside the SSSI will therefore also influence this species' status on this site.

Recreational disturbance due to the popularity of this site and the considerable numbers of visitors who use the site throughout the year, may affect a number of sensitive species at this location.

Some of the interests of the site are particularly vulnerable to the long term influence of climate change.

**Date last reviewed: 25 March 2009**

