

North East Scotland Habitat Statements



**NORTH
EAST**
SCOTLAND
Biodiversity
Partnership

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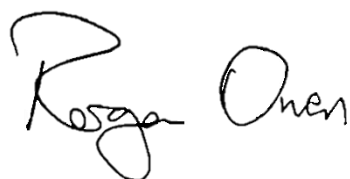
Foreword

North East Scotland is blessed with some of the greatest diversity of habitats in any region of the United Kingdom. From high mountain tops, through extensive heather-clad moorlands, semi-natural woodlands and mixed farmland to lowland peatlands and an incredibly varied coastline, the North East is rich in natural and cultural landscapes.

Most of these habitats have been influenced by management to a greater or lesser extent. Much of the land area is used for agriculture, whilst forestry occupies several extensive areas in the region. The built environment encompasses some of our most heavily modified habitats, but nonetheless hosts a range of special species with which people share their space. The combination of these habitats supports a rich assemblage of species, including many that are rare or threatened in the UK.

Early biodiversity strategies and plans included significant [focus on species](#). Certain key species remain as targets for action, both nationally and locally, and are described in [‘Scotland’s Biodiversity: A Route Map to 2020’](#). No doubt species will continue to feature in future government documents, however, it is widely recognised that well managed habitat is crucial for biodiversity success, and especially that habitats are interconnected in effective and functional habitat networks. Scotland simply cannot meet its biodiversity obligations and commitments, or the socio-economic opportunities for its future generations by relying solely on our network of [protected sites](#). All of our land and natural resources have to be managed to a better standard.

We are very fortunate in the North East of Scotland to have such an active and effective partnership for delivering real actions that improve biodiversity and demonstrate how all sectors can contribute to better management of our natural resources. I feel very honoured to chair this partnership and commend this set of habitat statements as an ambitious but realistic strategy for better wildlife diversity which people can appreciate and value.



Roger Owen
Chair – North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership

Introduction

We have moral and statutory obligations towards the habitats and species present in North East Scotland. Decisions about the management of all of our land will shape the character of such areas and determine the social and economic opportunities that will be available for many years to come. With pressures from an increasing population and ever greater demands on natural resources, it is essential that we recognise and protect our most special places. However, it is equally incumbent upon us to recognise and seize opportunities for enhancing all of our natural environment, whether it is protected by designation or not. We hope that this document will provide some signposts towards achieving these outcomes. This is the [Biodiversity Net Gain](#), increasingly seen as essential.

Aim of this document

This document provides an introduction to key features of the habitats found in North East Scotland. It gives an overview of issues that affect these habitats and pointers towards some opportunities for conservation actions. Thus, it is intended to assist with current and future management of these habitats. The document may be of use to conservation planners, landscape planners, private landowners, developers and local communities, seeking to maximise benefits for both biodiversity and future generations.

This document should be used in conjunction with more detailed guidance on specific features or management actions, such as that found in local authority planning guidance or in habitat management handbooks.

Scope of the document

The area covered includes the unitary local authority regions of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. The latter two regions overlap in part with Cairngorms National Park. As the National Park is a planning authority that issues separate guidance, the focus of this document is on the parts of Aberdeenshire and Moray that fall outside the National Park. However, examples from within park boundaries are used in places, and the maps show the distribution of habitats throughout the areas covered by the whole of the three regional authorities.

Policy framework

The [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) was launched in 1993. It was eventually supported by 168 nations, including the UK. As a first step towards meeting requirements of the conventions, the UK government published a national biodiversity strategy and action plan, [‘Biodiversity, the UK Steering Group’s Report: Meeting the Rio Challenge’](#) in 1995. Subsequently, Local Biodiversity Action Plans were developed on a regional basis, with the North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Plan one of the first to be published in 2000. In 2010, protection of biodiversity became a matter devolved to the Scottish government. The initial strategy, [‘Scotland’s Biodiversity: It’s In Your Hands’](#) was published in 2004, followed, in 2013, by [‘2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity: a strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland’](#). These two documents are together known as the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

The 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity sets out the major steps needed to improve the state of nature in Scotland. It aims to:

- protect and restore biodiversity on land and in our seas, and to support healthy ecosystems
- connect people with the natural world, for their health and well-being, and to involve them more in decision making
- maximise the benefits for Scotland of a diverse natural environment and the services it provides, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

[‘Scotland’s Biodiversity: A Route Map to 2020’](#) was launched in 2015 to help direct the highest priorities for action. It sets out six Big Steps for Nature, plus the various priority projects needed to achieve each big step. The Big Steps are:

- ecosystem approach
- investment in natural capital
- quality greenspace for health and education benefits
- conserving wildlife in Scotland
- sustainable management of land and freshwater
- marine and Coastal ecosystems restored

Our habitat statements will provide information to landowners, businesses, public bodies and the people of North East Scotland about how they can work together to protect and enhance our biodiversity and assist in the region’s contribution towards the success of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

Legislation/statutory framework

There are several levels of protection for those sites in North East Scotland that are recognised as being the most important for nature conservation. International statutory designations (that confer a degree of legal protection) are the European Union designations of Special Area of Conservation (SAC - for habitats) and Special Protection Area (SPA - for Birds). Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a British-level designation. These designations often overlap, and some sites are designated for all three. For the distribution of statutory designated sites, information on the features of individual sites, and details of operations that are restricted on these areas, see the [SiteLink pages](#) on the Scottish Natural Heritage website.

The Local Nature Conservation Sites network is a tool for flagging those sites considered by local experts to have particular value for nature conservation, including sites which have not been granted other statutory designations. Identification of these sites provides opportunities to ensure that their biodiversity value is promoted through local plan policy. Details of these sites and their key features can be found here.

Aberdeen City	LNCS Site Maps and descriptions booklet.
Aberdeenshire	LNCS details (inc maps) in supplementary planning guidance section.
Moray	General Designated Site information.

Each local authority maintains a Local Development Plan. These must be reviewed every 5 years and provide further guidance on how the conservation of the habitats covered in this document, and their associated biodiversity, are promoted in each region. Supplementary Guidance is also available from each local authority providing more details on management of biodiversity and open spaces to support implementation of the local plans. These



documents are available from the websites of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils.

How this document was created

Individual statements were written by ecologists with particular knowledge of the respective habitats. Each statement was then subject to a consultation process involving conservationists from the research and charity sector, statutory bodies and the local authorities. The statements are deliberately concise, in order to increase their accessibility to non-specialist readers, whilst still highlighting key features influencing habitats and opportunities to improve their status. Maps were created by the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre [NESBReC](#), using the [EUNIS dataset](#), a standardised habitat description system used across Europe.

Further information

The habitats of North East Scotland are further described in Francis & Cook (2011, *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland*) and in Littlewood et al. (2017, *Mammal Atlas of North-East Scotland and the Cairngorms*). These publications also provide more detailed statements on the status and distribution of birds and mammals respectively of the region. A range of habitat data can also be viewed online, or downloaded, through [The Habitat Map of Scotland \(HabMoS\)](#).

Further information on these and other taxa are available from a range of sources. [NESBReC](#) holds species and habitat data in map form from across the region and can provide detailed responses to data requests for specific areas. Species data are also available through the National Biodiversity Network, including through its [NBN Atlas Scotland](#). Detailed plant distribution data can also be viewed through the maps section on the website of the [Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland](#). Note that some species data may not be available through these portals. These may include recent records, sensitive records or datasets that are held and managed entirely by individual recording schemes. A list of recording schemes is held by the [Biological Records Centre](#) and individual scheme organisers should be contacted for specific queries relating to individual taxa. [Scotland's environment web](#) provides a portal to a range of environmental data across Scotland, which can be interrogated at a local level.

We strongly encourage use of evidence in planning conservation actions. This can increase the chance of achieving the desired outcome, improve cost efficiency and avoid repeating mistakes made previously. To this end, we urge practitioners and planners to consult literature documenting effectiveness of biodiversity actions that are being considered. One source of such information is [Conservation Evidence: Providing evidence to improve practice](#).

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