

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

**DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT  
CASTLETOWN, CO. ANTRIM. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE  
CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND)  
ORDER 1985.**

The Department of the Environment (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area described and delineated 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 "Castletown Area of Special Scientific Interest".

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich dry grassland. This type of grassland tends to occur where soils are freely draining and in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result, it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland where species-rich grasslands are often fragmented, consisting of individual fields or parts of fields. In addition, species-rich swards in Northern Ireland tend to be of wetter grassland types. The meadows at Castletown are an exception to this with a group of four fields composed primarily of a species-rich dry grassland type.

Castletown hay meadows are on a gently sloping south facing hill. Soils have developed from basalt parent material and are fairly free draining. Minor variations in surface topography and drainage have resulted in local pockets of damp soil. Here plants typical of wetter soil conditions are found which add to the floristic diversity of the site. Past and current management practices have also influenced the species composition of the area.

The four fields at Castletown are managed as hay meadows. They contain a range of species typical of dry grasslands that have been managed at low intensity. The grasses Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* are common throughout. A range of herbs including Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* are widespread and in places abundant. The Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and *D. fuchsii* are abundant in the meadows. Where the soils are less freely draining species such as Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* are more frequent in the sward.

Castletown represents a significant area of semi-natural habitat managed in a traditional way. As such, it provides valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including birds and invertebrates. A variety of butterflies have been recorded in the meadows including Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* and large numbers of Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* and Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*.

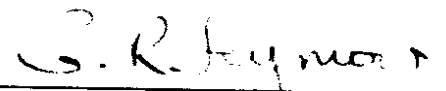
## SCHEDULE

**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 established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.
3. The application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.
4. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill any form of wild plant, other than plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
5. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraph 4 above.
6. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for:

- (i) plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
  - (ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which a consent is not required under paragraph 2 above.
- 7. The release into the area of any animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice) or plant. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates; 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore.
- 8. Burning.
- 9. Introduction of woodland management, including afforestation and planting.
- 10. Construction of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
- 11. Alteration of natural or man-made features.
- 12. The killing or taking of any wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 17, 20, 21 and 22 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
- 13. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area:
  - (i) Educational activities;
  - (ii) Research activities;
  - (iii) Recreational activities;
  - (iv) Exercising of animals.
- 14. Changes in hunting practices.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of the Environment 25 APRIL 2001



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**G R SEYMOUR**  
Senior Officer of the Department  
of the Environment

## FOOTNOTES

- (a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the operations or activities listed in the Schedule 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 in the Schedule 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 normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.