

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT DEVENISH ISLAND, COUNTY FERMANAGH. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.

The Department of the Environment (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 'Devenish Island Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its breeding waders and species-rich wet grassland. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where land management is not intensive, in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result, it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland and is often fragmented, consisting of individual fields, parts of fields or banks. Species-rich wet grasslands, like those found at Devenish Island, are a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

Devenish Island is a lightly grazed drumlin island in Lower Lough Erne. The island has a central ridge sloping down to the lough shore. The combination of topography and the related soil hydrology has resulted in a range of species-rich wet grasslands on the island. These vary from rush pasture to fen meadow, with base-loving plants present throughout the area.

Devenish Island has, in the recent past, been a highly significant locality for breeding waders in a Northern Ireland context, with more than 60 pairs having been recorded. At least 14 pairs of waders were present on the site in 2006, including 5 pairs of Curlew *Numenius arquata* and nine pairs of Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. During the period 1998 – 2006 Devenish has held an average of 17 pairs of waders. The island therefore continues to be one of the most important wader sites in the Lower Lough Erne basin. Mean populations for principal species over this period were: Curlew – 4 pairs; Snipe – 7 pairs; Redshank *Tringa totanus* - 4 pairs; Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* – 2 pairs. Other breeding birds include Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*.

The vegetation on the island is dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, with a variety of grasses and sedges and in places is markedly species rich. This provides cover for nests and young birds. Other important factors for breeding birds are the heavy nature of the soils which remain wet even in summer and the adjoining lough shoreline, which provide an abundance of food for adults and young birds. The island is also relatively free from disturbance and predation with the main tourist attractions of Devenish located to the southern end of the island away from the more valuable habitats.



Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture occurs over much of the island, with fen meadow present on the slopes to the north and east of the island. Fen meadow is a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture. It occurs on Devenish Island where there is a steady hydrological influence flowing through the soil which results in the occurrence of species adapted to both water movement and wetter conditions. Species characteristic of this community on Devenish Island include Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*.

Sedges and rushes are often important components within the sward and include Tawny Sedge *Carex hostiana*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*, Yellow-sedge *C. viridula*, Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*, and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* with Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus*, Compact Rush *Juncus conglomeratus*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutifloris* and Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*.

On the central ridge of the island, the Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture tends to be less species-rich. Common species here include Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and White Clover *Trifolium repens*. This poorer rush pasture is also more prevalent towards the southern end of the island, where it forms a mosaic with drier semi-improved lowland meadow with Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Meadow vetchling, *Lathyrus pratensis*, Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* pasture.

Fringing the island's shoreline is a slightly drier vegetation community that is base-rich and adds great diversity to the island's habitats. The community is characterised by its diversity of higher plants and has a high combined herb and sedge cover. The variation in hydrology and related topography, and past and present management has resulted in a considerable range of species present in a relatively small area. Plants of note reflecting the higher base status of the soils on this part of the island include Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*.

Fen habitat provides further diversity and adds to the conservation interest of the area. The area of fen occurs both in the central lowland section of the island and also fringes much of the shoreline. In the central section where the water table is very low and the slopes are gentle, periodic flooding of the fen vegetation occurs creating a relatively expansive wetland habitat. The shoreline is inundated by water from the lough and has Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* swamps which grade into a narrow fringing fen that surrounds most of the island. The tall herb fen associated with the shoreline has species such as Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and Flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus* with the more sedge rich low-lying central fen community characterised by Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* with Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*.

Devenish Island is an area of semi-natural grassland and associated habitats that have been managed in a traditional way. As such, it provides valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including invertebrates such as Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*, Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* and Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*.

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.
4. The application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.
5. 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.
6. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraph 5 above.
7. 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 consent is not required under paragraph 3 above.
8. 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.
9. Burning.
10. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation, planting, clearing, selective felling and coppicing.

11. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
12. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
13. Operations or activities, which would affect wetlands (include marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
 - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
 - (ii) modification of the structure of any watercourse;
 - (iii) lowering of the water table, permanently or temporarily;
 - (iv) change in the management of bank-side vegetation.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.
17. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

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 (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.
- (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.