

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT LEVALLYMORE, CO. ARMAGH. 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 "Levallymore Area of Special Scientific Interest".

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich dry grassland communities.

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, part of fields or banks. Species-rich dry grasslands, like those found at Levallymore, are a particularly scarce resource even in south Armagh, where there is known to be a greater proportion of this habitat type.

Levallymore is situated on the north-western side of Slieve Gullion, about 6 km south of Camlough. Soils are shallow brown rankers and are well drained over much of the area.

The grassland communities at Levallymore are of a species-rich dry type except for localised patches of wet, rush *Juncus* spp. dominated grassland. They range from moderately species-rich swards in some field units to areas with abundant orchids and herbs reflecting a long history of traditional management. The moderately species-rich swards tend to be grass dominated with frequent Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. Associated meadow species include herbs such as Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* and Common Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*.

Although many of the fields at Levallymore are described as herb-rich, they also tend to be grass dominated with Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Crested Dog's-tail

Cynosurus cristatus and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* all common with Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* also notably constant in the sward. However, there is a much richer herb component including many meadow indicators such as Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera* and Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*. In some fields, areas of outcropping rock occur locally. Here very thin soils support a quite species-rich acidic flora. Fine-leaved grasses tend to dominate here with Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Sheep's Fescue *F. ovina*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* and Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea* all frequent. Species suggestive of the more acid and drought conditions present include Mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Dog Lichen *Peltigera canina* and the moss *Campylopus introflexus*.

In addition, Levallymore is notable for the collection and relative abundance of the hemi-parasitic species Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. The orchids Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza* spp. are abundant in places. Several other species are worthy of note. Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis* is present in several fields. This is a species of scattered distribution in Northern Ireland, more often observed along verges than in meadows. Field gentian *Gentianella campestris* was also recorded from one of the acid outcrops – this is the first record of this species in County Armagh. The notable grassland fungus *Hygrocybe intermedia* has also been found, a species reflecting the low nutrient status of the soils.

Levallymore represents a large area of semi-natural grassland and associated 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 area including Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* and Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*.

SCHEDULE

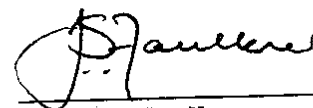
The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area:

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 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, artificial fertiliser or lime.
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. Introduction of woodland management, including afforestation and planting.
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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment
hereunto affixed is authenticated
by



Dr J S Faulkner
Senior Officer of the
Department of the Environment

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Dated the 27th of March 2002

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. 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.