



Department of the Environment
for Northern Ireland



ENVIRONMENT
AND HERITAGE
SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT QUOILE, COUNTY DOWN. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (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 its 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 'Quoile Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of the quality and diversity of the vegetation and its associated wildlife. Quoile contains a very wide range of habitats, ranging from mature, semi-natural woodland and scrub, to open water, swamp, fen and unimproved wet grassland. As a result of this diversity, plant and animal communities are very rich and include a number of scarce species.

The area is set within the drumlin landscape of County Down and is centred around the former tidal estuary of the Quoile River. Following the construction of a flood-control barrage at Hare Island in 1957, the estuary became subject to more pronounced freshwater influences. This led to changes in wetland communities from predominantly saline to brackish and freshwater. The open waters contain a range of aquatic species, including Fennel Pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus*, Fat Duckweed *Lemna gibba*, Greater Duckweed *Spirodela polyrhiza* and Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea*.

Around the water's edge there is a band of swamp, often dominated by Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Bulrush *Typha latifolia*. Areas of tall fen are more species-rich with Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*. In slightly drier locations these species are joined by Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Common Sedge *Carex nigra*. A wide range of other species are also present, including Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Silverweed *Potentilla anserina*, Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea* and notably False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*.

Grassland occurs on mineral soils on raised ground. This is typically dominated by grasses such as Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, with a range of herbs and sedges such as Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Cat's-ear

Hypochaeris radicata, Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, Autumn Hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*. Wetter areas are typically dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Soft Rush *J. effusus*, with Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*.

In addition to its wetland and grassland interest, Quoile represents one of the largest areas of semi-natural woodland remaining in County Down. The woodland is also notable for the wide range of plant species and vegetation communities that are present. This diversity reflects the natural transition from wet woodland, found on poorly drained low-lying ground, to drier woodland on the more freely-draining drumlin slopes.

On drier soils, the mature woodland canopy is generally dominated by Oak *Quercus* spp. and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with occasional non-native species such as Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* often form a well-developed shrub layer below. The ground flora consists of a wide variety of species including Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Great Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Ivy *Hedera helix*. Other characteristic species include Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Pignut *Conopodium majus*. Ferns are conspicuous, with Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, Male-fern *D. filix-mas*, Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* all abundant. Mosses are widespread, generally at low cover values, and include *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Eurhynchium praelongum*, *Mnium hornum* and more notably *Leucobryum glaucum*.

Wet woodland and scrub are widespread. Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* are the main canopy species. Ground cover is variable, with tall stands of Common Reed *Phragmites australis* growing over a moss mat of *Calliergon cuspidatum*. Other species such as Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* are often present. More species-rich areas include Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, with Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Common Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and Branched Bur-reed *Spartanium erectum* in wetter sections.

The area contains many scarce plants. Notable species include Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Nodding Bur-marigold *Bidens cernua*, Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, Flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus*, Slender Spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis*, Hard-grass *Parapholis strigosa*, Rigid Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*, Grey Sedge *Carex divulsa* and Lesser Pondweed *Potamogeton pusillus*.

Significant numbers of birds use the area. The movements of wintering waterfowl are closely connected to the tidal cycle on Strangford Lough. Large numbers of Wigeon *Anas penelope* are regularly recorded, with Teal *Anas crecca*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* also frequent. Up to 200 Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* moult in the area in late summer. Breeding waterfowl include Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Coot *Fulica atra*, Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*. Waders, including

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, nest in the wet grasslands. The mature woodlands contain typical woodland bird communities, and include Buzzard *Buteo buteo*.

Quoile is also notable for its mammals. Otter *Lutra lutra* are regularly seen, and Badger *Meles meles* and Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* are known to frequent the area.

The invertebrate communities of the area are rich and varied. There is a range of species associated with brackish conditions, and notable species include the hoverfly *Platycheirus immarginatus*, the rove beetle *Stenus ossium* and the water-bug *Sigara concinna*. The presence of the water-bug *Sigara lateralis* is also significant, as this species has rarely been recorded before in Northern Ireland. Other notable invertebrates recorded along the river margins are the rove beetles *Stenus canaliculatus* and *Oligota pumilio* and the ground beetles *Trechus discus* and *Pelophila borealis*. Butterfly species recorded include Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*, Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* and Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*.

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 limestone, 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. Any change in the annual pattern of 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 (4) or (5).
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 a consent is not required under (3).

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 (including marsh and streams), eg
 - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
 - (ii) modification of the structure of any watercourse;
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, 12, 16, 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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 30 March 1998



ROBERT C MARTIN
Assistant Secretary

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 give normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.

