

RATHLIN ISLAND - COAST

Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

A statement of Environment and Heritage Service's views about the management of Rathlin Island - Coast Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of Environment and Heritage Service about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Environment and Heritage Service has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of Environment and Heritage Service is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the schedule on pages 1 and 2 of the attached Document B for a list of these operations and activities). Environment and Heritage Service welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Maritime Cliff and Slopes

Maritime cliff and slopes are an important habitat for wildlife. Much of the vegetation in the ASSI consists of maritime grassland on slopes with crevice and ledge plant communities on sheer rock faces. These occur as part of a mosaic with other vegetation such as heath, scrub and flushes. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the habitat through the conservation of its diverse communities and associated native plants and animals.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, the habitat generally benefits from some management to retain its interest. Although occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, in the absence of management, coarse grasses can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant.



Grazing is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species, helping to maintain a diverse sward structure which continues to support species-rich grassland and heath. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses may be desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing over parts of the ASSI has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice where this is feasible. Where grazing is not feasible, other management practices, such as cutting, may be used.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive maritime cliff and slope species through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the habitat by encouraging the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the habitat from drying out.

Coastal vegetated shingle

Coastal vegetated shingle is an important habitat for wildlife. It occurs where shingle sediment and natural debris are deposited on the strandline above the high water mark. The deposition of seaweed can be particularly important as it provides nutrients to a habitat that would otherwise be nutrient-poor. Rare plants such as Oysterplant and Scots Lovage are particularly adapted to these unique conditions. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the strandline through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Specific objectives include:

The deposition of natural debris, especially seaweed, onto the shore creates unique conditions for strandline habitats. Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management practices which allow the development of a natural strandline.

Where recreational pressures are significant enough to result in the loss of vegetation cover and prevent recovery, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the restoration of the vegetation through the sensitive management of access.

The Geological Series

Earth science features provide information about a region's geological history and can also aid interpretation of geological processes in the past and present.

The earth science interest at Rathlin Island - Coast occurs as important cliff and foreshore exposures of basalts and associated rocks at Maddygalla, Doon Bay and Ruenascarrive. Environment and Heritage Service would like to encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.

Provided no damaging activities, as set out in the Schedule (pages 1 and 2), are undertaken without consent, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met.

Earth science features such as those at Rathlin Island - Coast may require occasional management intervention to maintain access to and exposure of the geology. This could include, for example, selective removal of vegetation or any major build up of loose rock.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological series in an undamaged state.

Maintain access to the geological series.

Breeding Seabirds

The Rathlin Island Coast ASSI supports the largest aggregation of breeding seabirds in Northern Ireland. The site holds numbers of Fulmar, Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull that are important in an all-Ireland context. The suitability of the site for breeding seabirds is largely dependent on its physical structure. This determines the availability of nest sites and may reduce the vulnerability of nests to predators. It is therefore important that the physical integrity of the site is maintained as far as is possible, taking into account natural processes.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the seabird colony through sensitive management of the cliff habitat and the island environment in general. Disturbance may affect the breeding success of seabirds as eggs or young birds on ledges are particularly vulnerable to being accidentally dislodged if adults are startled. The source of such disturbance can originate both from the land and the sea and may particularly affect birds nesting near the top and base of the cliffs during the breeding season (April – July).

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sensitive management of cliffs and cliff edges to avoid disturbance to both the sea birds and the cliff ledges that they use for nesting.

Peregrine

Rathlin Island - Coast ASSI supports numbers of breeding Peregrine that are important in an all-Ireland context. These falcons are largely dependent for prey on the island's cliff-nesting birds. The maintenance of the Peregrine population within

the ASSI is therefore closely linked to the successful conservation of cliff habitat, within which the Peregrines themselves nest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of Peregrine numbers through appropriate management of the cliff habitat and the island environment in general.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sensitive management of cliffs and cliff edges to avoid disturbance, both to active Peregrine nests and traditionally used nest sites which have been temporarily abandoned.

Intertidal Rock

Rocky shores are an important habitat for wildlife. The intertidal, or littoral, zone is composed of a variety of different habitats and communities, including rock pools, bedrock ledges and platforms, gullies, crevices and boulder fields, and sea caves. A diverse range of seaweeds and marine animals are associated with these habitats and most are specially adapted to periods of immersion. In addition beyond the seaward edge of the ASSI has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in accordance with Habitats Directive. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of both littoral and sublittoral rock habitats through the conservation of their associated native plants and animals.

Active management of rocky shores is usually minimal as these are naturally occurring habitats dominated by tidal processes and wave exposure. It is important that good water and sediment quality are maintained. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to maintain the coastline in as natural a state as possible. Direct damage to rocky habitats can be caused by activities such as dredging and construction. In addition, man-made structures may have an impact by altering the wave regime and the sediment budget within the coastal system.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution as this may affect reef communities, particularly due to increased turbidity (which may reduce algal communities) or siltation (which may smother animal communities).

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management which favours the natural processes of sediment movement.

Environment and Heritage Service would discourage the unregulated removal of species through bait digging, shellfish gathering and seaweed harvesting, which can lead to damage to, or a loss of, coastal communities and habitat.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage sustainable fishing practices and, where appropriate, the development of non-disturbance zones.


Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

Maintain the diversity and quality of the habitats by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage all activities associated with site maintenance, management, access and recreation to be undertaken in a sensitive manner that ensures disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the main habitats, such as sandy shores, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.


E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 01st of February 2008

