

# Appendix 7: SNH Site Management Statement – Birks of Aberfeldy



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
All of nature for all of Scotland

## **BIRKS OF ABERFELDY** **Site of Special Scientific Interest**

### **SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 208

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#### **Purpose**



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

#### **Description of the site**

The Birks of Aberfeldy was selected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its gorge woodland and lichen interest. It is a mixed woodland flanking the gorge of the Moness Burn, a tributary of the River Tay at Aberfeldy. The deep rocky gorge is incised through schists and gneisses (metamorphic rocks) of Dalradian age. The woodland has been shown on maps since the 1750s.

The upper Birks is mostly covered by mixed broad-leaved woodland of ancient, semi-natural origin. That is woodland, almost certainly derived from post-glacial time, with a continuity of woodland cover of at least 250 years and perhaps up to 8000. The most widespread woodland type where the soil is drier and less fertile is oak and birch, with beech in some sections. Ash and rowan woodland is restricted to the banks of the Moness Burn, and along the gorge in its upper reaches. Alder and ash woodland is found in occasional wet areas associated with the sides of burns or in wet hollows. There are a number of open areas. The lower section, adjacent to Aberfeldy and the A826 has been highly managed and is largely open beech with planted rhododendron and other exotic trees and shrubs, and is used widely by the public for car parking and picnics.

The ground flora of the Birks, as with other gorge woodlands, is very varied with a large number of rare species. The ground flora of the gorge section ranges from dog's mercury to creeping soft-grass and herbs in more open areas, with male fern in the steepest areas. Closer to the burn the ground flora includes wood melick, hedge woundwort and wood chickweed. The woodland has a high number of species present and includes the nationally scarce small cow-wheat and lesser hairy brome.

The naturalness and diversity of the site is threatened by invasion by non-native tree species (including beech, sycamore and Norway spruce) and bracken. Natural regeneration is hindered by roe deer grazing. However a degree of deer grazing is of benefit in maintaining the open nature of the wooded slopes.

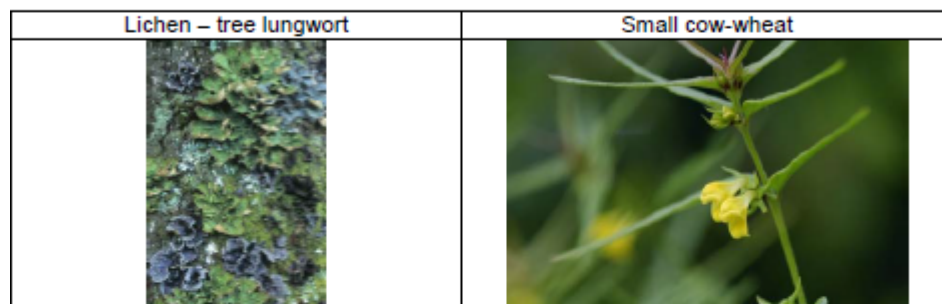
The water flow down the main stream and the seepage from streams on the valley sides give rise to relatively humid conditions - making the Birks of Aberfeldy a good habitat for

## Appendix 7: SNH Site Management Statement – Birks of Aberfeldy

lichens. There are a large number of lichen species growing here including twenty two which are nationally scarce in the UK. The lichens present include a combination of oceanic and continental species which may be due to the relative east – west centrality of the site combined with humid conditions in the gorge of the Moness Burn.

The Birks of Aberfeldy SSSI is also an important habitat for breeding birds including pied flycatcher and green woodpecker, as well as an important over-wintering site for brambling, redwing and fieldfare.

Below the Falls of Moness the burn forms part of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation for Atlantic salmon, otter, brook lamprey, sea lamprey and river lamprey.



### Current condition of the natural features

The upland mixed ash woodland was monitored in 2000 and found to be in good condition. Woodland regeneration and structure are both good. However non-natives especially beech can cover up to 25% of the site in places but overall were within the targets. Beech regeneration is an increasing problem and control is needed.

The lichen assemblage has not been monitored.

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Birks of Aberfeldy SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)
Upland mixed ash woodland	Favourable, maintained (August 2000)
Lichen assemblage	Not monitored yet

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features <sup>1</sup>	Feature condition (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Atlantic salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>	Favourable, maintained (October 2004)	SAC
Brook lamprey <i>Lampetra planeri</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
River lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
Sea lamprey <i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SAC
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Favourable, maintained (April 2004)	SAC

<sup>1</sup> The River Tay SAC is also designated for its clear water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels. However this feature is not present within Birks of Aberfeldy SSSI.

## Appendix 7: SNH Site Management Statement – Birks of Aberfeldy

enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site, its natural features and the effectiveness of management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives above have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi -SiteLink facility).

### Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

- Periodic path maintenance, improvement and management of the car parks.
- Planning permission granted for the Hydro-electric scheme within the SSSI.

Date last reviewed: 17 November 2010