

# Appendix 8 SNH Site management Statement – Den of Alyth



**Scottish Natural Heritage**

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## **DEN OF ALYTH Site of Special Scientific Interest**

### **SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 501

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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**

Den of Alyth is notified as an SSSI for its upland mixed ash woodland. It lies between about 115 and 170 metres altitude, along the Alyth Burn (which drains into the River Isla, and then into the Tay). The gorge is one of a series running approximately north-south in east Perth & Kinross that were cut by glacial meltwater from the receding Cairngorm ice mass about 10,000 years ago.

The SSSI is mostly semi-natural mixed woodland with several plants which are locally uncommon, including lily of the valley and birds-nest orchid. The tree species within the woodland vary across the site depending on soil conditions. On the richer soils at the base and sides of the Den, ash-birch woodland has developed and covers about a quarter of the site. Sycamore and elm are also present in the canopy here. Hazel can be common in the understorey and the ground flora is rich in species such as dog's mercury and herb bennet among others. To the south of the burn ash is regenerating well.

Oak-birch woodland is found on the well-drained but relatively nutrient-poor upper slopes of the Den where it covers almost half of the site. Hazel is frequent in the understorey here and a carpet of greater woodrush often dominates the ground flora.

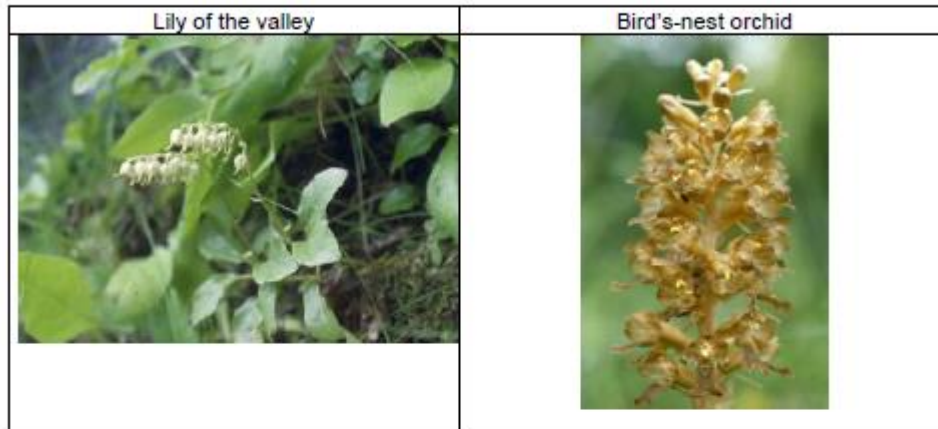
Wet ash woodland occurs in about 2% of the site in small wet hollows where the ground flora is typically a carpet of golden saxifrage and creeping buttercup, and along the main burn where plants such as sweet cicely and meadowsweet can frequently be found.

Around one sixth of the semi-natural woodland (particularly the ash/birch community) has been altered by the planting or natural regeneration of non-native beech, creating the modified woodland types of beech/ash and beech/oak. Beech was introduced to Scotland and casts a heavy shade over much of the year and produces a thick and persistent leaf litter. There are few native species which can survive in these conditions, so where the beech is dense, the ground is often virtually devoid of vegetation.

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Sycamore is another species that has been introduced and is present in parts of the site. Both the beech and sycamore are regenerating and expansion of these species would lead to a loss of the semi-natural communities and the special qualities of the Den. The remainder of the site is a mix of scrub, the open water of the burn and amenity grassland and car park.

The Alyth Burn which runs through the centre on the site is part of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is designated for Atlantic salmon, three species of lamprey, otters and clear water lochs.



### Current condition of the natural features

The upland mixed ash woodland feature is currently unfavourable. This is mainly due to the presence of a large amount of non-native species such as beech and sycamore.

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

Natural features of Den of Alyth SSSI	Feature condition(date monitored)	
Upland mixed ash woodland <sup>1</sup>	Unfavourable no change – July 2006	
Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features <sup>2</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 (September 2001)	SAC
River lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	Favourable, maintained (September 2001)	SAC
Sea lamprey <i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	Favourable, maintained (September 2003)	SAC
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Favourable, maintained (April 2004)	SAC

<sup>1</sup> Monitored as upland oak woodland but assessment considered to be likely to be the same for upland mixed ash woodland

<sup>2</sup> The River Tay is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for Atlantic salmon, three species of lamprey and otters. However this feature is not present within Den of Alyth SSSI

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### Past and present management

The Den of Alyth is thought to have been wooded for at least 200 years, although the areas of woodland on the cliffs may be more ancient. There appears to have been some felling during the First World War, followed by replanting immediately afterwards - mostly of introduced beech and chestnut.

About two thirds of the Den of Alyth SSSI is owned and managed by Perth and Kinross Council. The Earl of Airlie and Mr A.C. Kinloch-Smythe gifted this area to the then Alyth Town Council as a public open space in 1923. There is an SNH Management Agreement in place in part of the northern area of the SSSI.

The area under Council ownership is open to the public and is actively managed for conservation, recreation and education. There are three car parks near the public road and a network of footpaths, two footbridges and the Tullyfergus road bridge allows access throughout. The woodland is a popular walking area, especially for local residents, many of whom are regular visitors and value the mature beech trees, and this must be taken into account when considering management of the site. Schools and field study groups frequently use the Den for educational and research purposes.

### Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

The site is currently unfavourable due to the wide-spread presence of non-native species, in particular beech and sycamore. The regeneration of these species should be controlled and where possible, individual trees should be felled. It should be done very sensitively as many members of the public view these non-natives as an attractive part of the amenity woodland.

The primary objectives for management are:

- Increase the extent of semi-natural woodland and encourage natural regeneration of native species
- Prevent the regeneration of non-native species (e.g. beech and sycamore)
- Reduce non-native trees gradually by: removing small saplings/trees and ensuring that when large/veteran trees fall or have to be felled for health and safety reason they are replaced by native species.

We wish to work with the owners to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary 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 and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management agreement.

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

None known

Date last rev



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