



## Geodiversity

### Policy Summary

Scottish Wildlife Trust will promote the conservation of Geodiversity through its work on its reserves and its support for the Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites system (RIGS).

### Policy Statement

1. Scottish Wildlife Trust recognises Geodiversity as an essential component of our natural heritage.
2. Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that land management practices should recognise conservation of geodiversity as a major aim and attribute high value and importance to this.
3. Scottish Wildlife Trust will promote education about Geodiversity by raising awareness by means of interpretation on appropriate Reserves and through the promotion of 'Rockwatch', the Wildlife Watch club for young geologists.
4. Scottish Wildlife Trust will promote the conservation of Geodiversity through its work on its reserves and its support for the Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites system (RIGS).

### Context

The geological story of Scotland is all around us in our rocks, soils, landforms, landscapes and active processes. These physical components of the natural heritage, the Geodiversity, are closely linked to biological components of the natural heritage, biodiversity, through the relationship between rocks, soils, habitats and species. The relationship is fundamental - most habitats cannot exist without the supporting medium of soils, and soil cannot form without weathering processes acting on the underlying subsoils and rocks.

Rocks, soils and landforms are resources that provide essentials for life. These include water, raw materials for manufacturing and construction, soil for agriculture, land for recreation, and coal, oil and gas for energy. They also support habitats and species, and so are vital for the Earth's biodiversity.

Geodiversity is a dynamic subject - not just old rocks. Animals and plants that are growing today, plants decaying to form peat bogs, and soil washed off the fields during storms are parts of the processes of creating rocks of the future. These processes of rocks first supporting soil development then plant and animal growth, which then decay and become part of the soil and rock formation cycle, are parts of the biodiversity cycle of life. Habitats and species (both now and in the future) cannot exist without this cycle.

Maintaining Geodiversity is as important as maintaining biodiversity, since both are fundamentally linked.

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS), identified by locally developed criteria, are currently the most important places for geology and geomorphology outside statutorily protected land such as Geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (GSSSI). The designation of RIGS is one way of

### Protecting Scotland's wildlife for the future

Headquarters: Cramond House, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS  
•Tel: 0131 312 7765 •Fax: 0131 312 8705 •Email: [enquiries@swt.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swt.org.uk)

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recognising and protecting important Earth science and landscape features for future generations to enjoy. There are currently five RIGS Groups operating in Scotland covering 11 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. The Groups are composed of professional and amateur geologists, planners, teachers, museum specialists and representatives from the British Geological Survey, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Landowners Federation, Historic Scotland, and Local Biodiversity Action Plan groups.

RIGS are equivalent to local Wildlife Sites and other non-statutory wildlife designations. They have started to be listed in local authorities' development plans and shown on "alert maps". RIGS can be protected through the planning system if a RIGS group recommends sites to the local planning authority. Conservation and management of sites will usually depend upon agreements and co-operation with landowners. RIGS are described and their use by the planning system encouraged in National Planning Policy Guideline 14: Natural Heritage (Scotland, 1999) produced by the Scottish Executive.

## **SWT Strengths and priorities for action**

Scottish Wildlife Trust's Memorandum of Association states that an object of the Trust is "To record and study places and objects of ...geological...or scientific interest or natural beauty or to arrange by agreements with owners or otherwise to protect from injury or destruction." And also "To protect, organise and encourage study and research for the advancement of knowledge in the natural sciences...".

Although there are no specific targets relating to it within the Corporate Strategy, Geodiversity and its maintenance have to be considered when implementing a number of Corporate Strategy priorities.

### ***Wildlife Reserves (Corporate Strategy Priority 1)***

At least 17 current Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves have major Geological or Geomorphological special interest within them (see appendix 2), alongside their Biological interest. It is desirable that greater effort is made on such reserves to highlight this geodiversity interest. Reserves staff and volunteers should take full account of the way geodiversity affects the landscape and wildlife of Trust reserves, particularly during the completion of management plans. Management plans should fully consider whether geodiversity conservation techniques are appropriate for use on a particular reserve.

In order that staff and volunteers can take better account of geodiversity concerns, action is desirable in two areas – awareness raising and training. Awareness of geodiversity techniques and principles should be raised throughout the Trust and this can be achieved in a variety of ways. Similarly, reserves staff and volunteers should be trained in geodiversity management techniques, such as specialised training from an external provider, site visits to appropriate geological/geomorphological sites and through receiving relevant publications.

### ***Designated Sites and Wildlife Sites (Corporate Strategy Priority 2)***

Many Wildlife Sites have Geodiversity interest, and for some the wildlife interest is a direct result of the underlying geology. However, since the early 1990s it has been agreed that Scottish Wildlife Trust would not assess and designate local Geodiversity sites that were of purely geological interest. Instead the process would be devolved to the growing UK RIGS (Regionally Important Geological Sites) system, co-ordinated and initially funded by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation.

In Scotland the RIGS system currently has 5 RIGS local committees made up of Geoscience specialists. They have so far designated, and had accepted by the Local Authorities, 18 RIGS throughout Scotland with others in the pipeline.

However, the lobbying for Local Authority and other protection and of RIGS was not devolved, as there are no other NGOs in Scotland that argue nationally for the defence of RIGS once designated. That task remains with Scottish Wildlife Trust under its Articles of Memorandum and it has the geological advice available to it to carry out this task. It currently does this through its involvement in the planning system and when Wildlife

Sites are promoted and protected in Local plans RIGS where identified are included and argued for to the same level of planning protection at the same time.

### ***Education and Lifelong Learning (ELLL) (Corporate Strategy Priority 7)***

As geodiversity and biodiversity are fundamentally linked, then ELLL plays a key role within SWT in raising awareness accordingly. This can be achieved through articles on geodiversity in Trust magazines and the production of information sheets on geological and geomorphological conservation, through lectures and workshop at Trust conferences and seminars, through organising appropriate training events and through the promotion of a geodiversity theme at events.

In our Corporate and Interpretative Strategies, we make a commitment to visitors on reserves and to interpretation on key reserves. As a number of Trust reserves have geological or geomorphological special interest, then any interpretation implemented should recognise this interest. Geodiversity demonstration sites can be established and promoted widely using appropriate reserves and a catalogue of reserves with geological or geomorphological importance should be created.

Our ELLL programmes at reserves, Visitor Centres and at events should, where appropriate, have a geodiversity element to them. Geodiversity is already well promoted to our junior membership, Wildlife Watch, through 'Rockwatch', the Geologists Association club for young geologists. This can also be adapted for use by school groups, through our Watch Education Service, and by older young people, through our Greenwatch programme.

### **Links to other SWT policies**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following SWT policies:

- Wildlife Sites
- Landscape and Wildlife Reserves
- National Parks
- Access to Wildlife Reserves
- Acquisition, Review and Disposal of Wildlife Reserves

### **References**

References are listed in the appendices attached.

### **Date of approval of policy by Council**

This policy was approved by Council on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Scottish Biodiversity Group paper on Geodiversity

Appendix 2: A review of the geological interest of current SWT reserves

Appendix 3: A development strategy for the RIGS movement in Scotland 2000-2005