

RAHOY HILLS

WILDLIFE RESERVE

Rahoy Hills Wildlife Reserve is a large area of wild, remote land in the peninsula of Morvern in the western Scottish Highlands. It comprises 1764 hectares (4358 acres) of moorland, bogs, mountains, woods and lochs. It is an excellent example of the west Highland environment and landscape, with typical plants, birds, mammals and insects of this part of Scotland.

Rocks, soils and landforms

This is something of an 'upside-down' landscape in that the richest rock and soil, and hence the most herb-rich vegetation, is at higher altitudes. Dark, crumbly, nutrient-rich Tertiary basalt – a young, igneous rock – forms the higher hills of Beinn Iadain (571 m) and Beinn na h-Uamha (464 m). These hills show the distinctive basalt landform of steep sides, flattish tops and horizontal lines of cliffs. Around their edges are small areas of Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous sedimentary rock. The surrounding ground, comprising most of the reserve, is of Precambrian schist: an ancient, hard, pale grey metamorphic rock. This is largely covered by acidic peaty soils, broken by rock outcrops, streams and a few lochs.



Wet heath and bog on schist upland in foreground. Grassland and cliffs on steep basalt slope of Beinn na h-Uamha beyond.

Vegetation

The most extensive types of vegetation here, clothing large tracts of peaty ground on the schist rocks, are wet heath and bog. These consist mainly of heather,

purple moor-grass and deergrass, the last two species turning a beautiful golden colour in autumn.

On the lower slopes are woods of oak, birch, rowan, hazel and ash. This woodland is a form of temperate rainforest, internationally important for its rich assemblages of mosses, liverworts and lichens including several rare species.



Mossy oak woodland with purple moor-grass

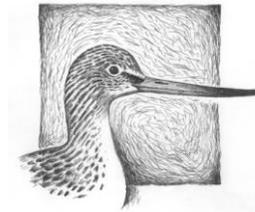
On Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h-Uamha the nutrient-rich basalt soils support herb-rich vegetation which is nutritious and palatable to deer and sheep, and is more heavily grazed than the surrounding wet heaths and bogs. Grazing has reduced the abundance of heather, so grassland predominates but among the cliffs are inaccessible ungrazed areas with luxuriant and colourful patches of tall herbs. Several rare mountain plants grow on Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h-Uamha. Botanically, these two hills combined are one of the best montane basalt sites in Britain, with clear floristic links to the basalt hills of the Faroes and Iceland.



Tall herb vegetation on the basalt cliffs of Beinn Iadain

Birds

The varied habitats in the Reserve are home to a good range of bird species. Hill birds include golden eagle, greenshank, golden plover and dunlin. Woodland birds include buzzard, woodcock, great-spotted woodpecker, tree pipit, redstart and wood warbler.



Greenshank



Redstart

Butterflies and dragonflies

Among the sixteen species of butterfly recorded here are the pearl bordered fritillary which is uncommon in Britain, and the purple hairstreak which is rare this far north. These two uncommon species occur in and around the woodland. Eleven species of dragonfly and damselfly occur, including the nationally uncommon northern emerald and the predominantly south-western keeled skimmer and beautiful demoiselle.

Mammals

Mammals include red deer, roe deer, wild cat, pine marten, mole, otter, short-tailed vole, wood mouse, weasel, common shrew, pygmy shrew, water shrew, fox and pipistrelle bat.



Red deer

Reptiles and amphibians

These include common toad, frog, lizard, palmate newt and slow worm.

History and management

This part of Morvern has been occupied by humans since prehistoric times. Within the Reserve are at least four deserted settlements which once included houses, barns and corn-drying kilns. These settlements were abandoned by the mid 19th century. The Loch Arienas woods contain the remains of charcoal burners' huts, charcoal platforms and a stone dyke dating from about 1780 which suggests that the wood was enclosed to protect it from grazing animals.

Rahoy Hills Wildlife Reserve is now owned by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (NW part) and Ardtornish Estate (SE part). It has been a nature reserve since 1975 and is managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Ardtornish Estate. The whole Reserve is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and large parts of it are also designated under European law as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The Reserve is grazed by red deer, roe deer and domestic livestock: sheep and cattle. Grazing affects the vegetation and ecology in various ways. For example it maintains short grassland on the basalt slopes where the vegetation would otherwise be taller and more heathy. Grazing limits the growth of young native trees, so parts of the woodland have been fenced since 1991 to exclude deer and sheep and to allow natural regeneration to develop.



Young and old trees and an old stone dyke in an ungrazed enclosure at the upper edge of the Arienas woods

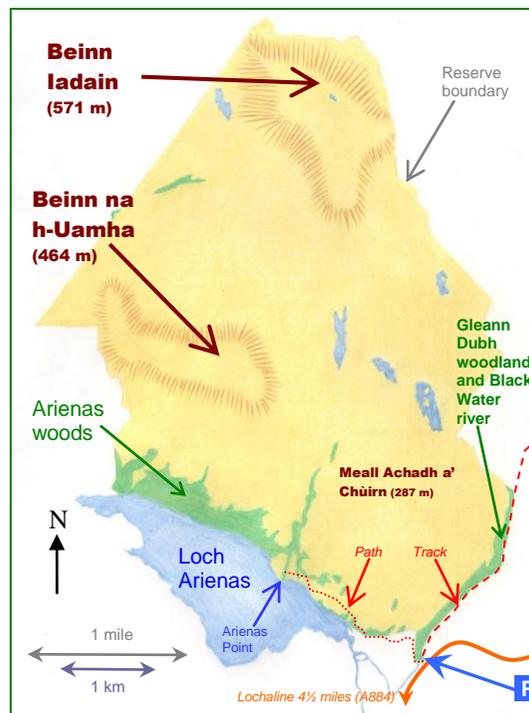
Information and Advice

For those interested in knowing more, or visiting the Reserve, please contact the Ardtornish Estate Office at Achranich near the head of Loch Aline (OS grid reference NM 705473; tel. 01967 421288) or the Scottish Wildlife Trust Northern Regional Office (tel: 01463 714746) during normal office hours.

Further information about the nature and history of Morvern can be found in various publications available from the shop in Lochaline.

Access

There is an informal car-parking area at Acharn (OS grid reference NM 703506), just off the A884 Lochaline-Strontian road. From here at the southern edge of the Reserve a track leads north-east through the oak woodland of Gleann Dubh (along the south-eastern Reserve boundary), and a mile-long footpath runs north-west from the bridge over the Black Water river to Arienas Point at NM 688512 on the north-eastern shore of Loch Arienas. Throughout the Reserve the ground is generally rough and frequently wet, so stout footwear is always advised.



Scottish Wildlife Trust
Glakemore, North Kessock, IV1 3UD

Tel: 01463 811497

Scottish Wildlife Trust: Charity Registration No. SCO 05792



Leaflet designed, written and illustrated by Ben Averis

Front cover photos – Top: north side of Beinn Iadain, from the north-west.
Bottom: View from the western slopes of Beinn Iadain, looking SSW to Beinn na h-Uamha.



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