

## CITATION

**RONAS HILL – NORTH ROE  
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**  
Shetland Islands

Site code: 1370

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: HU 323855  
OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 1 and 3  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 469  
AREA: 4900.94 hectares

### NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

<b>Geological</b>	<b>: Quaternary geology and geomorphology</b>	<b>: Quaternary of Scotland</b>
<b>Biological</b>	<b>: Bogs</b>	<b>: Blanket bog</b>
	<b>: Upland Habitat</b>	<b>: Montane assemblage</b>
	<b>: Woodland</b>	<b>: Scrub</b>
	<b>: Birds</b>	<b>: Breeding bird assemblage</b>
		<b>: Red-throated diver (<i>Gavia stellata</i>), breeding</b>
	<b>: Invertebrates</b>	<b>: Arctic water flea (<i>Eurycercus glacialis</i>)</b>

### DESCRIPTION

Ronas Hill – North Roe Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in Northmavine, in the North Mainland of Shetland. It comprises the area from the north shore of Ronas Voe in the south, except inbye land at Feal, to the Uyea track in the north, excluding fenced apportionments at Scord of Sandvoe. In the east, the site extends to the burns of Orrwick, Twa-roes, Roerwater and Houlland. It includes the Collarfirth Hill and the Beorgs of Collarfirth and Skelberry down to the 100 m contour and the Beorgs of Houserter to the 50 m contour. In the west, the boundary follows the coastline (low water mark) from Ronas Voe to Innri Geo and the fence line around Helvadale Hill and Whitley Hill. The site also includes several sea stacks.

The summit and surrounding slopes of the domed granite massif of Ronas Hill - the highest hill in Shetland – and the North Roe plateau are notified for a number of features of conservation interest. Of geomorphological importance is the range of peri-glacial features occurring on Ronas Hill. Biological interests include montane habitats and blanket bog, which support a range of breeding birds, in particular red-throated divers, and invertebrates, most notably Arctic water fleas. Relict tree-scrub vegetation survives on some of the inaccessible loch islands and on ledges and crags.

Peri-glacial features are formed in extremely cold environmental conditions. They occur on Ronas Hill at a lower altitude than anywhere else in Britain. They include solifluction terraces, created by the slow downslope flowage of water-saturated soil or weathered sediment, and ablation surfaces, formed by removal of rock material by wind action. The subarctic-oceanic climate has produced ground-pattern features, the most important of which are turf-bank terraces, wind stripes and composite stripe-terrace features. Hill dunes and small incipient polygons also occur. These active features result from wind and frost, the effects of which are seen more clearly than on any other upland area in Britain. Large-scale relict frost-action phenomena including stone-banked terraces and blockfields (spread of coarse, angular, frost-shattered rock debris) are also present.

The wide basin of North Roe in the north of the site is covered by extensive blanket bog over deep peat. The habitat is of international significance and is characterised by the presence of a large number of lochs and pools and well-developed peat mounds, of origin so far unknown.

To the south, Ronas Hill supports a range of montane habitats. Heather moorland with bog bilberry *Vaccinium uliginosum* and mountain bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpinus* dominates the vegetation up to around 230 m. It grades into an extensive area of prostrate heather *Calluna vulgaris* - woolly fringe-moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* heathland. On the higher slopes of the hill, the fell-field supports Arctic-alpine plant communities, with species such as alpine lady's-mantle *Alchemilla alpina*, alpine saw-wort *Saussurea alpina*, trailing azalea *Loiseleuria procumbens*, mountain sorrel *Oxyria digyna* and three-leaved rush *Juncus trifidus* occurring at an unusually low altitude. Ronas Hill-North Roe is the most important site in Shetland for montane species, with several species confined to the area.

A number of the lochs north of Ronas Hill contain small holms inaccessible to grazing animals. A significant proportion of Shetland's relict tree and scrub sites are present on these islands. Those in the lochs of Maadle Swankie and Clubbi Shuns are of particular importance, supporting downy birch *Betula pubescens*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, willow *Salix* spp. and dwarf juniper *Juniperus communis* subsp. *nana*. A similar habitat is provided by the inaccessible ledges and crags along the Beorgs of Skelberry and Housetter and on the northern shores of Ronas Voe where rowan and aspen *Populus tremula* can be found.

The peatlands of North Roe hold a rich community of breeding moorland birds including Arctic and great skua, dunlin and golden plover. Of particular importance in the national context is the large number and high concentration of red-throated divers which nest on the numerous peaty pools and lochans. Indeed, the site includes the second densest breeding aggregation of red-throated divers in Britain.

The Ronas Hill area has considerable invertebrate interest. Notably, the Arctic water flea occurs in lochans on the hill. It has only been found at one other site in Britain.

## NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1961 (Ronas Hill SSSI)

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 5 December 1986 (site extended to include North Roe and de-notification of an area in the south-east resulting in an overall increase of about 1155 ha)

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25 February 2011

## REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 4906.67 ha).

Ronas Hill – North Roe SSSI is designated as Ronas Hill – North Roe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats listed below and as part of Ronas Hill - North Roe and Tingon Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

### Ronas Hill – North Roe SAC

Habitats: Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds  
Acidic scree  
Alpine and subalpine heaths  
Blanket bog  
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels  
Dry heaths  
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

### Ronas Hill - North Roe and Tingon SPA

Birds: Great skua (*Stercorarius skua*), breeding  
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), breeding  
Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), breeding