

JNCC is a statutory adviser to UK Government and devolved administrations



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## UK Protected Sites

The UK supports a wide variety of species and habitats, ranging from cold water coral reefs to saltmarshes and mountain summits. A key policy tool for conserving them all is the designation and management of protected sites - areas of land, inland water and the sea that have special legal protection to conserve important habitats and species.

Legal protection prevents damaging activities. Some of the sites, known as [Special Protection Areas](#) (SPAs) for Birds and [Special Areas of Conservation](#) (SACs), are of European importance. They have been created under the [EC Birds Directive](#) and [Habitats Directive](#). In the UK they form part of a larger European network called Natura 2000.

In addition, the UK and its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies also contribute to global networks of protected sites created under the [Ramsar](#), [World Heritage](#) and [OSPAR](#) Conventions.

Within the UK sites that are nationally important for plants, animals or geological or physiographical features are protected by law as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – or in Northern Ireland as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) - and Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs). This system provides the underpinning statutory protection for all sites, including those which are also of international importance.

The JNCC acts on behalf of the statutory conservation agencies and associated government departments by collecting information on designated sites for nature conservation in the UK and the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. We also assist in the interpretation of criteria for site selection and in forming guidelines to aid that process.

Our role supporting establishment and management of protected sites includes:

- Carrying out surveys and analysing data to support the selection and review of SPAs at [sea](#) and on [land](#).
- Identifying and selecting SACs and SPAs in [UK offshore waters](#) and co-ordinating with country agencies the submission of details on all potential Natura 2000 sites to the European Commission.
- Working towards creating a network of well-managed [marine protected areas](#) under the OSPAR Convention.
- Developing cost-effective approaches with the country agencies to monitoring [and assessing the "favourable conservation status"](#) of European priority habitats and species.
- Developing guidance on the use of new Earth Observation techniques in terrestrial habitat surveillance, based around the [Crick Framework](#).
- Maintaining guidance on the selection of [biological](#) and [geological](#) SSSIs in Great Britain.

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