

Lochinver Glebe – Preliminary Ecological Assessment

December 2019

For Kirsty Crichton, Highland Small Communities Housing Trust



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Introduction

Investigations are being made into the development of The Glebe and adjacent land, Lochinver. The site is at NC100 222. It's location and boundaries are shown in Appendix 1, Map 1.

A field visit was carried out on 11 December 2019 by Reuben Brown (Highland Council ecologist). This field visit was to assess the site and the immediate surroundings in terms of protected species and terrestrial habitats that are likely to be present and which may be impacted by the proposals. Conditions for the visit were poor – wet, cold, and stormy – but it was judged that a preliminary assessment of ecological issues could be made. Further survey work in more appropriate conditions is recommended later in this report.

The National Biodiversity Database (<https://scotland.nbnatlas.org/>) was consulted to determine if any species records exist for the site.

This report summarises the findings in terms of protected species and habitats identified and provides guidance on further survey and any licensing and/or mitigation required.

Please note: in the following tables, those species and habitats identified as either present or potentially present on site and likely to be impacted by the works have been **highlighted in red**.

Disclaimer

The main limitations in this protected species survey are recognised to apply to most ecological surveys. The surveys undertaken in the study area used sampling techniques, and were not absolute censu. Results give an indication of numbers and activities of species at the particular times that surveys were carried out. Species occurrence changes over time; so the results presented in this report are snapshots in time (specifically December 2019).

Protected Habitat

The site surveyed has a total land area of around 10Ha, with a range of habitats present, including grassland, scrub, standing and running water, and woodland of various ages. The topography is varied.

Table1: Protected habitats

Habitat	Present (Yes/No) or potential	Will the development impact adversely on this habitat (Yes/No)	Risk based on current info	Surveys required depending on NBN records
Ancient woodland, long established woodland of semi-natural origin and long established woodland of plantation origin	No	No	N/A	Habitat survey. Mammal and breeding bird surveys. Reptile survey.
Woodland (broadleaved)	Yes	Yes	Medium	Mammal and breeding bird surveys (if felling proposed). Reptile survey.
Woodland (coniferous)	No	No	N/A	Mammal and breeding bird surveys (if felling proposed). Reptile survey.
Individual Mature Trees	No	No	N/A	Mammal and breeding bird surveys. Reptile survey.
Hedges/Scrub	Yes	Yes	Medium	Mammal and breeding bird surveys. Reptile survey.
Running water (including ditches)	Yes	Yes	Low	Fish, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Otter, Water vole surveys.
Standing water	Yes	Yes	Medium	Otter, Great Crested Newt, Water Vole and breeding bird surveys.
Wetland or bog	Yes	Yes	Medium	Breeding bird surveys. Newts, Otter, Water Vole and Reptile survey.
Rough grassland and moorland	Yes	Yes	Medium	Breeding bird surveys. Reptile survey.
Buildings/dykes/walls/bridges	Yes	Yes	Low	Bat, breeding bird survey, reptile survey.
Brownfield/post- industrial site	No	No	N/A	Mammal and breeding bird surveys. Reptile survey.
Coastal/marine	No	No	N/A	Fish, Dolphin, Porpoise, Whale, Turtles and Otter surveys. Breeding and

				wintering birds. Reptile survey.
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European Protected Species

No European Protected Species are likely to be found on site, due to a lack of appropriate habitat and high disturbance levels.

Table 2: European Protected Species

Species	Present (yes /No) or suitable habitat to support these species	Risk based on current info	Potential Impact and Mitigation
Vertebrates			
Dolphins, Porpoises and whales	No	None	N/A
All Bat species	Unlikely	Low	No potential bat roost features found in trees – most trees young or early mature. Records of soprano and common pipistrelle bats within 1km of the site.
Otter	Unlikely	Low	No otter shelters found. Records of the species within 1km of the site.
Wildcat	Unlikely	Negligible	No records within 5km. Some mammal denning opportunities, but likelihood of use very low.
Great Crested Newt	No	N/A	No suitable habitat exists.
Five Marine Turtles	No	N/A	N/A
Plants – All these are very rare or localised			
Killarney fern	No	No	N/A
Slender Naiad	No	No	N/A
Floating leaved water-plantain	No	No	N/A
Yellow Marsh Saxifrage	No	No	N/A

Other Protected Species

Breeding birds and reptiles are likely to be present on site.

Table 3: Other Protected Species

Species	Present (Yes/No) or suitable habitat to support these species	Risk based on current info	Potential Impact and Mitigation
Vertebrates			
Badgers	Possibly	Low	No signs of badgers were found within the site. Records within 1km of the site.
Birds – breeding	Yes	Medium	Trees, scrub and heathland provide suitable habitat for nesting birds. Vegetation clearance should not take place within the breeding season (March – August inclusive).
Pine Marten	Possibly	Low	No pine marten dens were found within the site. Records within 1km of the site.
Red Squirrel	No	N/A	No records exist within 10km of the site.
Water Vole	Possibly	Low	No water vole signs found on site. Records within 5km of the site.
Slow Worm	Potential	Medium	Habitat is suitable and records within 1km.
Adder	Potential	Medium	Habitat is suitable and records within 1km.
Viviparous Lizard	Potential	Medium	Habitat is suitable and records within 1km.
Invertebrates			
Fan Mussel (mollusc) West coast marine	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A
Freshwater Pearl Mussel	Not surveyed	N/A	Some potential habitat. Records within 10km.

Fish			
Allis Shad	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A
Twaite shad	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A
Salmonids, Lamprey & other fish species	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A
Plants – very localised			
Green Shield Moss	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A
Petalwort	Not surveyed	N/A	N/A

Invasive Non-Native Species

No invasive non-native species were found on the site.

Table 4-Invasive Non-Native Species

Species	Present (Yes/No) or suitable habitat to support these species	Risk based on current info	Potential Impact and Mitigation
Rhododendron ponticum	Yes	Medium	Some isolated plants. Removal and treatment recommended.
Giant Hogweed	No	N/A	N/A
Japanese knotweed	No	N/A	N/A
Himalayan Balsam	No	N/A	N/A
Mink	No	N/A	N/A

Constraints

Conditions for the visit were poor – wet, cold, and stormy – but it was judged that a preliminary assessment of ecological issues could be made. Further survey work is recommended where necessary.

Most of the survey area was accessible, although some stands of gorse to the east of the area were impenetrable, both along the Allt Loch Bad na Goibhre and on the land to the south of the road (see Appendix 1, Map 2). A further survey for mammals is recommended (see Results, below); if the scrub is due to be cleared, removal under the supervision of an ecologist may be recommended in the mammal survey report.

Results and Further Survey Requirements

A summary of survey results can be found in Appendix 1, Map 2.

Designated Sites

There are no relevant designated areas near to the site.

Bats

Trees on site were checked for potential bat roost features; none were found. This was largely due to the trees being of young or early mature age, and therefore not having developed the splits or cavities that bats favour. Habitat for foraging bats is good, with tree corridors and vegetation that will support good invertebrate numbers. Should development go ahead, any habitat retention will be positive for this species. Should any trees be felled, a further check of those trees for bat roost features should be made.

Otters

Potential otter paths were discovered close to the survey area, but no other otter signs were found. The Allt Loch Bad na Goibhre was difficult to survey because dense gorse and bramble surrounded the section upstream (north) of the site. Potential otter paths were discovered within these stands of scrub, but no spraint, prints, or shelters were discovered. It should be noted that conditions for the survey were poor and some signs (e.g. spraint) may have been removed by the wet weather. Nevertheless, it is considered that any shelters present would have been discovered during the survey. No further otter survey is considered necessary, except as part of a secondary search for protected mammals.

Other Protected Mammals

No signs of badger, pine marten, or water vole were discovered on site. However, the habitat is generally good, survey conditions were poor and some mammal denning opportunities were discovered, particularly at NC 09878 22250. As such, a further mammal survey is recommended, during the active summer season.

Nesting Birds

Nesting birds will have significant opportunities in the scrub, grass and trees on site. Vegetation removal works should avoid the nesting season - March to August (inclusive).

Reptiles

The habitat for reptiles is good, with a mixture of vegetation types and a generally south-facing aspect. The area around the Allt Loch Bad na Goibhre to the south of the road, in particular, has a number of open south-facing banks with good cover close by that provides excellent habitat. A reptile survey during the active summer season is recommended to establish presence/absence within the parts of the site that might be developed, with the results being used to decide whether any mitigation and/or compensation measures are appropriate.

The dry stone dyke forming the site's northern boundary provides potential hibernation opportunities for reptiles. Any changes to this wall should be avoided if possible. If such changes must happen, they should take place during the active summer season and be accompanied by the provision of at least one compensatory hibernaculum.

Invasive Non-Native Species

Two isolated *Rhododendron ponticum* plants were found on site. These should be removed by a competent practitioner, with suitable follow-up treatment carried out to ensure no re-emergence occurs. Plants were found at the following locations: NC 09942 22283; NC 09879 22250.

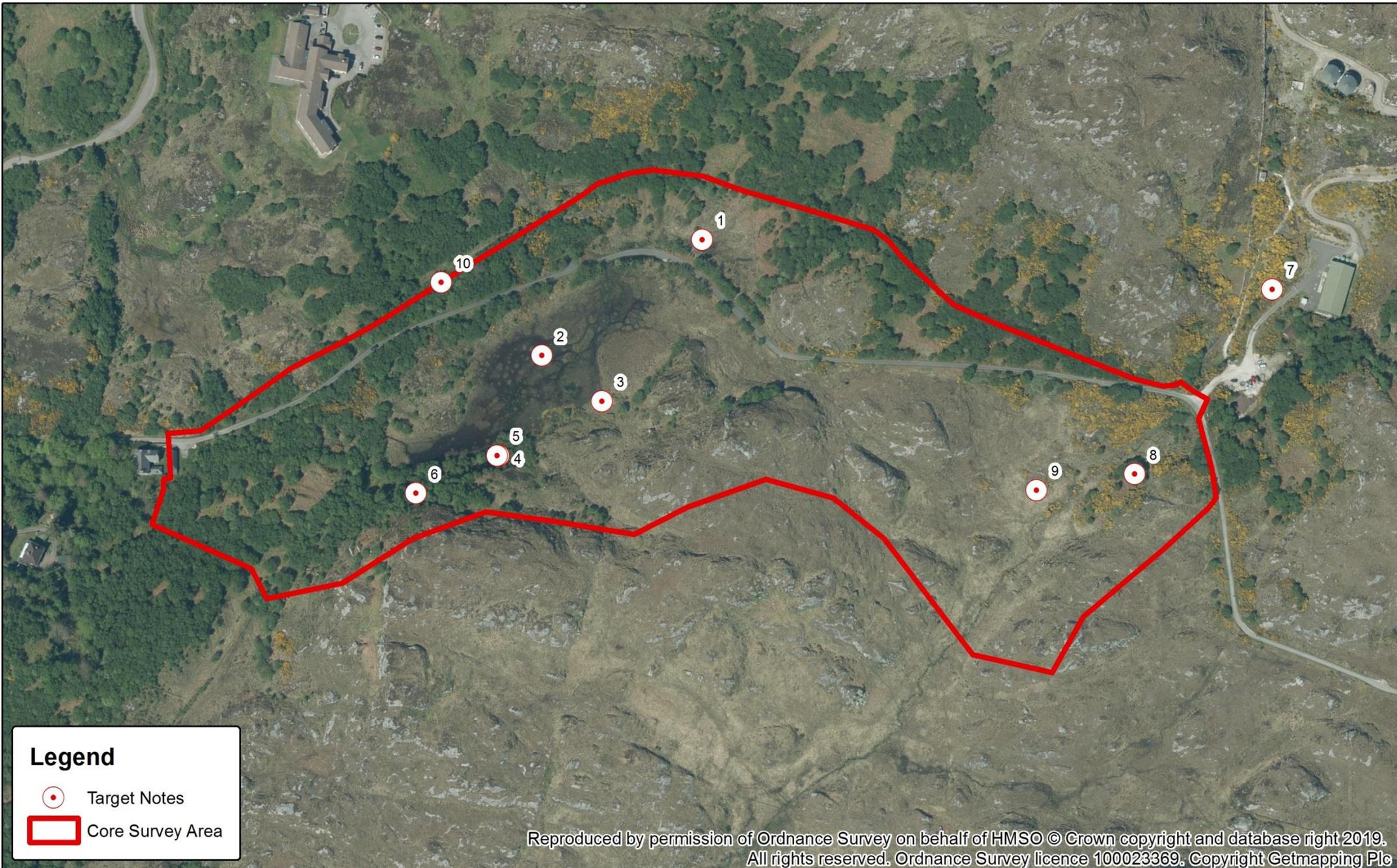
Wider Conservation Value

The site is known to host a selection of dragonflies and butterflies which, while less protected than the fauna considered above, include some species of conservation concern including the small pearl-bordered fritillary. The key habitats for these invertebrates are the marshy pool at NC 0988 2230 and the nearby birch woodland. Retention of these habitats is highly desirable from a conservation perspective, and it is therefore recommended that any development proposal eliminates or minimises impacts on them.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings are as follows:

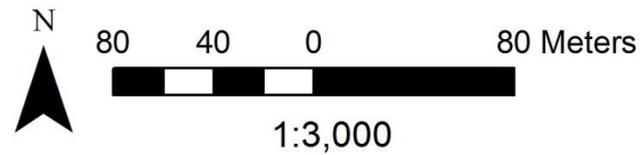
1. No potential bat roost features were found on site, although if trees are to be felled, a further pre-felling check should be made.
2. Otters are likely to use the area, although no shelters were discovered. No further survey is necessary.
3. As survey conditions and timing were poor for mammals, a summer search for badger, pine marten and water vole should be made during the active summer season.
4. Nesting birds will use the site. Any vegetation clearance should be carried out during the non-breeding season (September – February inclusive).
5. The habitat for reptiles is good. Surveys should take place during the active summer season to establish presence/absence and determine any mitigation/compensation measures required during development.
6. The dry stone dyke at the site's northern boundary has potential to be a reptile hibernaculum. Changes to this should be avoided. If this is not possible, works should take place in the summer, and an artificial hibernaculum should be provided in compensation.
7. Two *Rhododendron ponticum* plants within the site should be removed, with follow-up work carried out to ensure regrowth does not occur.
8. The site provides excellent habitat for dragonflies and butterflies. While these receive less legal protection than the other species considered, some species are of conservation concern and it is therefore recommended that any proposal eliminates or minimises impacts on the relevant habitats.
9. If works begin more than 18 months after this survey, it should be updated.



Map 2: Results

Lochinver Glebe

Ref:
Date: December 2019

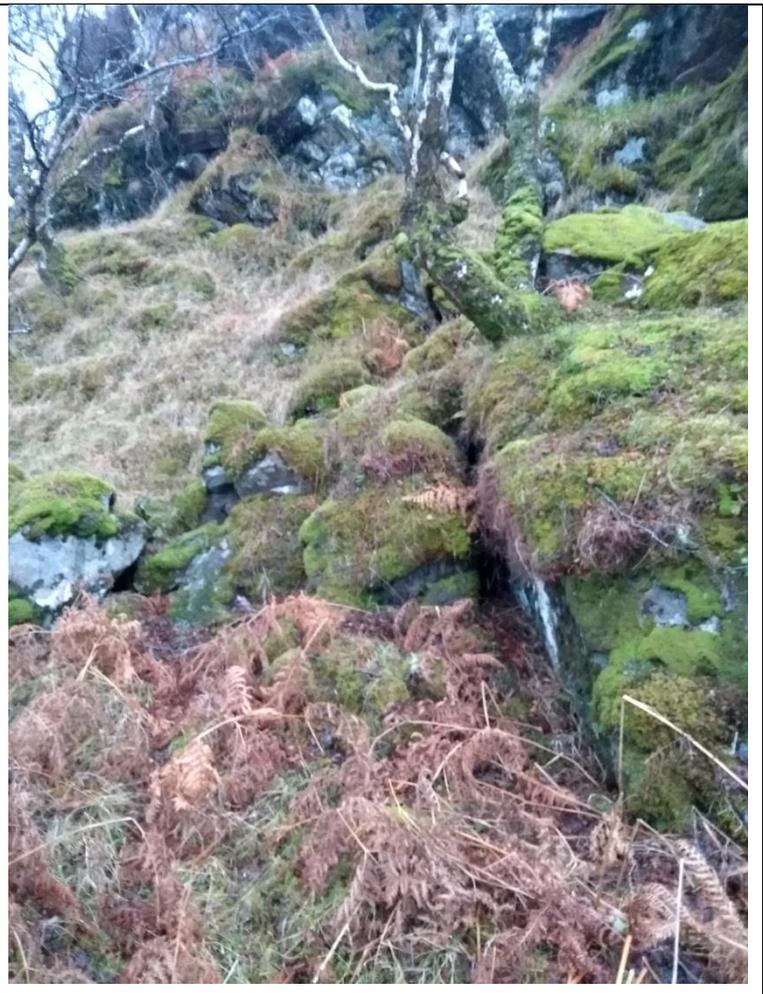


Target Note	Feature
1	South facing birch woodland; good butterfly habitat
2	Marshy loch with good dragonfly assemblage
3	<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> plant
4	<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> plant
5	Rocks in woodland with mammal denning potential
6	Mature trees; no potential bat roost features found
7	Probable otter path by burn (dense gorse)
8	Dense stands of gorse hard to survey
9	South facing banks – potential reptile habitat
10	Potential reptile hibernaculum in dyke

Appendix 2 Images from survey

Ref	Description	Image
1	Overview of site, looking north-west from bank at southern boundary.	
2	Thick gorse around the Allt Loch Bad na Goibhre. No otter or water vole shelters found, although probable otter paths discovered (Target Note 7).	

3	<p>Centre of site (Target Note 3), with marshy lochan, birch woodland, and <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> plant visible.</p>	 A landscape photograph showing a marshy lochan (pond) in the middle ground. The foreground is dominated by dense, brown, dry vegetation, likely gorse. In the background, there is a line of birch woodland and a small white building on a hillside under a cloudy sky.
4	<p>One of the dry south facing slopes favourable for reptiles (Target Note 9). This area features some dense stands of gorse (Target Note 8) that proved problematic to survey.</p>	 A photograph of a dry, south-facing slope. The foreground and middle ground are covered in dense, brown, dry gorse. The slope rises towards the background, where there is a line of trees and a small white building visible on the right side. The sky is overcast.

5	<p>Cavities within rocks provide mammal denning opportunities, although no field signs were discovered at the time of the survey (Target Note 5).</p>	
6	<p>Mature trees (Target Note 6) were found not to have potential bat roost features.</p>	

Appendix 3 Legal Protection of European Protected Species

European Protected Species

Bats, Typical (All species)
Common Otter
Dolphins, Porpoises, Whales (all species)
Great Crested Newt
Marine Turtles
Natterjack Toad
Sturgeon
Wildcat
Killarney Fern
Slender Naiad
Yellow Marsh Saxifrage

These species are protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994 (as amended). In Scotland, regulations 39 and 43 make it an offence, with certain exceptions, to:

1. Capture, injure, or kill any wild animal of a European Protected Species
2. Harass such an animal or group of animals
3. Disturb such an animal while it is rearing or otherwise caring for its young
4. Obstruct access to a breeding site or resting place, or otherwise deny the animal use of the breeding site or resting place
5. Disturb such an animal while it is occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection
6. Disturb such an animal in a manner that is, or in circumstances that are, likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species to which it belongs; or
7. Disturb such an animal in a manner that is, or in circumstances that are, likely to impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or otherwise care for its young.
8. Disturb such an animal whilst migrating or hibernating.
9. Deliberately or recklessly to take or destroy the eggs of such an animal
10. It is an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place (note this applies regardless of whether or not the damage or destruction was carried out deliberately or recklessly)
11. Deliberately or recklessly disturb a dolphin, porpoise or whale.
12. Deliberately or recklessly to pick, collect, cut, uproot or destroy a wild plant of a European protected species
13. Possess or control, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead animal or plant of a European protected species which has been taken from the wild, or any part, or anything derived from such an animal or plant.

These offences apply to all stages of the animal's life, and all stages of the biological cycle of these plants.

Appendix 4 References

- Highland Council's Supplementary Guidance – Highland's Statutorily Protected Species 2013
- Anon 1994: The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994: HMSO
- Anon 2004: The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2004: HMSO
- Anon 1981: Wildlife and Countryside Act. London: HMSO
- Froglife 1999: Reptile Survey: An Introduction to Planning, Conducting and Interpreting Surveys for Snake and Lizard Conservation: Froglife
- Mitchel-Jones A.J. and McLeish, A.P. 2004: The Bat Workers Manual; Third Edition: JNCC
- Bang, P & Dahlstrom, P 2001: Animal Tracks and Signs: Oxford University Press
- Olsen, L 2012: Tracks and signs of the animals and Birds of Britain & Europe: Princeton
- Sargent, G & Morris, P 1997: How to Find and Identify Mammals: The Mammal Society