

File ref:

**County:** Northumberland **Site Name:** Allendale Moors

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, as amended.

**Local Planning Authority:** Northumberland County Council  
Tynedale District Council

**National Grid Reference:** NY 820480 & NY 790470 **Area:** 5,282.81 (ha) (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 86, 87 **1:10 000** NY 74 NW, NE, SE  
NY 75 SE  
NY 84 NW, NE,  
SW, SE  
NY 85 SW

**First Notified:** 1998

**Other Information:**

The site is located within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As part of the North Pennines Moorlands part of the site fulfils criteria for consideration as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Community Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (The Birds Directive).

The importance of the bird assemblage of Allendale Moors is supported by the presence of the following species listed on Annex I of the EC Birds Directive: merlin, golden plover and short-eared owl.

The site supports the following species which are included in Red Data Birds in Britain, edited by L. A. Batten, 1990: red grouse, twite, golden plover, curlew, redshank, dunlin and oystercatcher.

The site abuts the following SSSIs which are notified separately under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, as amended: Whitfield Moor, Plenneller and Ashholme Commons SSSI, High Knock Shield Meadows SSSI and White Ridge Meadow SSSI, and overlaps Hartley Cleugh SSSI.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

The Allendale Moors comprise two upland moorland ridges between East and West Allen Dales, Nent Dale and Upper Weardale. This is one of the most extensive areas of blanket mire in the north of England and there are also considerable areas of heath, flush and upland grassland communities. The site supports a nationally-important assemblage of moorland breeding birds and is part of the North Pennine moorlands which are of international importance for their breeding bird populations.

The predominant vegetation on the moorland plateau is an associated of blanket mire communities dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* or, locally, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, with abundant hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and occasional deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. Bog mosses are generally abundant, principally *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. capillifolium* var. *rubellum*.

Peripheral areas of the moorland plateau have dry heath and acid grassland. The areas of dry heath are dominated by heather, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*. The acid grassland is generally dominated by heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* with mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, wavy hair-grass, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. Locally mat-grass replaces heath rush as the dominant plant.

Acidic flushes are abundant throughout the area. These are commonly dominated by soft-rush *Juncus effusus*, associated with bog moss *Sphagnum recurvum* and star-moss *Polytrichum commune*. There are also very localised patches of more species-rich flushes where sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, common sedge *Carex nigra*, star sedge *C. echinata* and herbs such as marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and marsh violet *Viola palustris* grow in association with soft-rush.

The underlying Carboniferous rocks outcrop in several places. Locally the Great Limestone has a rich lichen flora with several species which are rare in Northumberland, most notably the nationally rare and endangered elm gyalecta *Gyalecta ulmi*.

The Allendale Moors lie within the North Pennine Orefield which has a long mining history. The associated spoil-heaps are in various stages of revegetation and typically have a high content of heavy metals such as lead and zinc. This creates an unusual habitat for plants and characteristic metal-tolerant communities develop on some of the spoil heaps with typical plants including spring sandwort *Minuartia verna*.

The nationally important breeding bird assemblage includes merlin, golden plover, red grouse, black grouse, short-eared owl and dunlin which all nest on the open moorland. Curlew, snipe, lapwing and redshank nest on the moorland and use the adjacent enclosed grasslands.