

The Importance of Pladda

Introduction

Pladda. According to Wikipedia, "**Pladda** (Scottish Gaelic *Pladaigh*) is an uninhabited island 1 km off the south coast of the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. It is home to the automated Pladda Lighthouse. The island is privately owned, having been put up for sale by Arran Estate in 1990. The island was put on sale in 2022 for £350,000, and bought shortly after."



Pladda: Joan Thomson

The Island's familiar shape, with lighthouse and varied terrain from cliff to shore is the dominant feature of the seaward vistas from the south end of Arran. Cherished by residents and visitors alike the iconic views of outstanding natural beauty have been captured by innumerable artists and photographers over the years.

From my article in the Arran Banner on Friday 26 July 2024, "*Uncertain Future for Arctic Tern on Pladda*", (More info here, Arctic Tern on Pladda - Arran Birding <http://www.arranbirding.co.uk/arctic-tern-on-pladda.html>), I am concerned about the future of Pladda.

I have been in communication with a of range individuals and organisations who have all stressed the importance of Pladda, a unique rocky island with a lighthouse, a stable biodiverse flora, hosting a remarkable seabird colony in a marine protection area adjacent to two special protection areas and wish to share their opinions.

Expert Opinion

In this section I have tried to distil the extensive specialist knowledge of a range of individuals and organisations. This knowledge is based on considerable experience, sometimes involving decades of fieldwork. It was readily shared with me. These brief paragraphs are an attempt to provide a range of salient points for the interested reader.



World-class examples of dykes and sills are found on the coastline west of Kildonan, looking towards the island of Pladda.

The South Coast of Arran Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is of national importance for its geological interest, consisting of numerous exposed dykes known collectively as the Main Arran Dyke Swarm, as well as for its vegetated shingle beaches and maritime cliff habitat. While Pladda is not part of the South Coast of Arran SSSI, it has some of the geological aspects of this adjacent protected area. That is a Palaeogene igneous sill (in this case, quartz-microgabbro) sitting on top of Triassic

sandstone. The basalt dykes were intruded after the sill.

Extracted from information provided by Angus Miller of Geowalks and founding Trustee of the Scottish Geology Trust

Arran is nationally recognised as an “Important Plant Area” due not only to its list of nationally rare plants but to its rich biodiversity and sustainable levels of common flora. Pladda is part of that. Pladda is predominantly undisturbed, unimproved grassland with a mixed shoreline flora around the perimeter and the upper and lower grasslands dissected by cliff face flora which can cope with harsh conditions. The lighthouse keepers’ old enclosures still retain flora indicating ancient farming practices. Vascular plant counts total 146 for Pladda which is above average for a small isolated area of grassland. This total does not include bryophytes, fungi or lichens. The latest botanical survey carried out by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland was in 2016. This survey includes 26 species of grass, 7 species of rush, 10 species of sedge and 3 species of woodrush. Of that total count of 146, there are 3 on the Rare Plant Register of Arran. Important as the rare plants are, it is not the rare plants that provide the habitat, it is the general plants that occur in abundance, a great diversity of species unnoticed but essential for the ecosystem of Pladda to function. This undisturbed, unimproved habitat is essential for the fauna of the island providing food and shelter for resident and migratory animals.



West Pladda limited saltgrass: Sarah Cowan

Extracted from information provided by Sarah Cowan, Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland Joint Vice County Recorder, VC100 Clyde Isles.

Expert Opinion (continued)

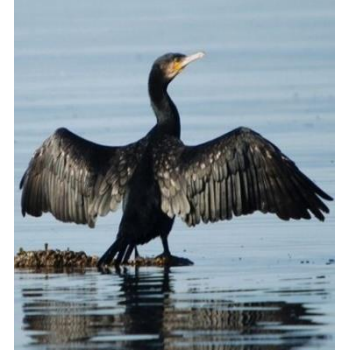


Arctic Tern; Dennis Morrison

Pladda is a remarkable sea bird colony, the only one in the Firth of Clyde with a breeding colony of Arctic Tern. Arctic Tern is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in the British Isles. It is not the only breeding species on Pladda on this Red List. The others are Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull. All the breeding gull populations are significant. In addition, some breeding species on Pladda are on the Amber List namely Eider and Shag. Other breeding

species on Pladda including Rock Pipit, Black Guillemot and Cormorant are on the Green List of least conservation concern but in relation to the Firth of Clyde the breeding population of Cormorant is significant on Pladda being one of only three locations in the Clyde where they breed.

Extracted from information provided by Iain Livingstone, Secretary of the Clyde Bird Ringing Group.



Cormorant; Angus Hogg



Harbour Seal; Brian Couper

Harbour seals: The shore at Kildonan extending through Auchenhew Bay towards Bennan is a designated seal haul out zone. It is one of only five areas in the Firth of Clyde designated through The Protection of Seals (Designation of Haul-Out Sites) (Scotland) Order 2014 that came into force on 30 September 2014. In recent years, the level of tourist footfall has increased dramatically, and with increased disturbance the areas where seals have been hauling out has spread, moving further and further west towards the Black Cave and moving onto Pladda where there have been increasing

reports of seals hauling out, the area around the jetty being particularly attractive.

Otters: There is a relatively dense population of otter living along the shore at Kildonan, foraging in the tidal bays, with holts on land and young being raised successfully. While otters do make use of Pladda and the waters around Pladda, the absence of reliable fresh water in any great quantity on Pladda means that it is unlikely to being used to raise young. Otters need to wash in rivers or freshwater pools daily to maintain their fur. Pladda is fairly marginal habitat for otters and of less importance than the Arran coast.



Otter; Brian Couper

Both harbour seal and otter are susceptible to human disturbance.

Extracted from information provided by Howard Wood, Co-Founder of Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) and Lucy Wallace Mountain leader and wildlife guide

Expert Opinion (continued)

Pladda is an island in the South Arran Marine Protection Area. This was designated in 2014 and legally enforced in 2016. It is the direct result of the setting up in 1995 of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) with the aim of reversing the decline in Arran's marine habitats.



Maerl: Howard Wood

Pladda is home to a diverse and ecologically significant marine environment. Beyond its rich kelp forests and seagrass meadows, the waters around Pladda support unique habitats, including a notable flameshell bed and two species of maerl beds. Flameshell beds provide vital habitats for various marine species, such as fish, crustaceans, and invertebrates. Flameshell beds not only stabilize the seabed but also foster biodiversity and act as nursery grounds for commercially important species. Similarly, the maerl beds around Pladda hold

significant ecological value. These beds are formed by slow-growing, calcified red algae, creating complex three-dimensional habitats that support a wide range of marine species. Flameshell beds, and maerl beds are vital to the biodiversity of the area and are equally vulnerable to human impact, making conservation efforts crucial for their survival. From our experience with island developments elsewhere, the post-construction phase is just as critical as the construction phase in protecting biodiversity. We trust that both phases will receive thorough scrutiny if a full application for planning permission is submitted.



Flameshell: Howard Wood

Extracted from information provided Aine Purcell-Milton, Executive Director, COAST

North Ayrshire Council Planning Department

North Ayrshire Council Planning Department recognises the importance of Pladda,

The advice to North Ayrshire Council Planning Department by NatureScot, the statutory body for protection of landscape and habitats environments, is described by Allan Finlayson, Chief Planning Officer, North Ayrshire Council Planning Department as *invaluable in identifying a list of surveys and information in relation to various aspects of the proposals which would require to be submitted with a future planning application to ensure that the potential environmental impacts of the development are fully considered.*

Any planning application should be accompanied by information to enable potential impacts on natural heritage receptors to be evaluated, which should be provided in the form of a targeted Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) report. Supporting information should include at least the following: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment including agreed viewpoints analysis; Archaeological Assessment; Biosecurity Plan; Botanical Survey; Visual seabed survey; Seal activity monitoring report; Otter Survey; Bat Survey; Breeding Bird Survey; and Hydrology assessment

The importance of Pladda is reflected in this extensive list.

(This is the link to the full document issued to the Isle of Pladda developers by Allan Finlayson, Chief Planning Officer, North Ayrshire Council Planning Department; https://www.eplanning.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/OnlinePlanning/files/343BA5BED0FE20BDEE43FDB9F45F1E5C/pdf/24_00530_EIA-EIA_SCREENING_OPINION-1235716.pdf)

The Next Stage

Following the prior enquiry/discussions between North Ayrshire Council Planning Department and Michael O’Sullivan, Director of Isle of Pladda Ltd., the present owner of Pladda, it is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted to North Ayrshire Council Planning Department.

I encourage you to look out for the planning application going in. Check the North Ayrshire Council Planning Department website using this link Simple Search <https://www.eplanning.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/OnlinePlanning/search.do?action=simple>

I encourage you to examine the planning application and check if the potential environmental impacts of the development as detailed above by North Ayrshire Council Planning Department, have been fully considered.

I encourage you to comment on the planning application. This link provides advice on how to do this <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-standards/planning-applications/comment-on-planning-application>

Comments to North Ayrshire Council Planning Department are taken into account during the decision-making process. (Letters to the “Banner” or comments on social media are **not** taken into account.) Anyone can make a comment on a planning application. The deadline for submission of comments is usually 21 days from date of notification, the date the notice appears in the “Arran Banner”.



Pladda: Joan Thomson