

New report finds Scottish shingle thriving

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Shingle habitat covered in Oysterplant

A geographical survey by the Universities of Southampton and Cambridge for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has found there are more vegetated shingle beaches in Scotland than previously thought – and the majority are in good condition.

Until recently information on shingle habitats in Scotland has been limited, but a new report compiled by [GeoData](#), at the University of Southampton, with research colleagues at Cambridge, finds there are around 1,120 hectares of shingle beaches with vegetation in Scotland.

"For the first time we've created a national inventory of coastal vegetated shingle habitats in Scotland," says Gemma Gubbins of GeoData. "This inventory forms a comprehensive baseline for ongoing monitoring and research and is already allowing comparisons to be made with earlier surveys."

Vegetated shingle supports a variety of plants and animals, with some highly specialised species adapted to tolerate harsh coastal conditions. Typical plants include the salt-tolerant oysterplant and sea kale, both of which are nationally scarce. A rich array of lichens can also be found on stable, undisturbed, shingle further inland.

Some species of invertebrates also favour shingle habitats, such as the black zipper spider, sand bear spiders and a number of rove beetles. The habitat is also of crucial importance for breeding terns, which has led to several conservation designations.

Shingle coastlines are a distinctive feature of the Solway and Moray Firths and the Isle of Arran, as well as on scattered sites around the coast of Scotland.

Vegetated shingle is one of the UK's Priority Habitats and is protected under the EU Habitats Directive and about 20 shingle sites in Scotland are protected under national legislation.

Rebecca O'Hara, SNH habitats officer, said: "Coastal shingle is internationally rare and is an important and unique part of Scotland's nature. Powerful waves form these beaches, which host a fascinating variety of plants and animals in what may seem to be inhospitable conditions. Because of this, we were really pleased to find that shingle habitat is doing so well. Scotland's remote and relatively untouched coasts provide some of the best conditions in Europe for vegetated shingle.

"This new survey adds to our growing knowledge of habitats of European importance in Scotland, and will be part of a new habitat map which SNH is developing."

Provided by University of Southampton

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