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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND
MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS
(CDPE)

Committee of Experts on Protected Areas

THE FAIR ISLE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA
(United Kingdom)

On-the-spot appraisal
(Renewal of the European Diploma, Category C)

Report by the independent expert

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with comments by the Secretariat

19.435
09.3



Forty years
Council of Europe
Quarante ans
Conseil de l'Europe

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Terms of reference

In accordance with Article 7 of the Regulations for the award of the European Diploma, Mr Joan Mayol, accompanied by Miss L'Hyver from the Secretariat, visited the site of the Fair Isle National Scenic Area in order to decide whether it would be appropriate to renew for a further five-year period the Category C Diploma awarded to the area.

1.1 The original award

Fair Isle applied for the Diploma on 3 February 1983 [SN-ZP (83) 24], and Mr Mario Broggi and Mr Peter Baum, from the Secretariat, carried out an on-the-spot appraisal - SN-ZP (84) 21 - between 8 and 12 July 1983 recommending that the Diploma be awarded subject to the conditions listed in Committee of Ministers Resolution (85) 14.

1.2 Details of the visit

The experts, accompanied by Mr Alexander Bennet (National Trust for Scotland - NTS), who is in charge of the National Trust for Scotland reserves in the northern and western Scottish Isles and has been Factor of Fair Isle since 1985, visited the area from 8 to 12 August 1988.

The experts were accommodated by islanders (the Stout and Clark families) during their visit and established many very friendly relations with a good number of local people. They also held several discussions with the people who play an important part in the management of the island, including Nick and Elizabeth Riddiford, officials of the FIBOT (Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust).

1.3 Thanks

We wish to thank all the islanders for their warm welcome and for making our work and leisure time very pleasurable; our particular thanks go to Mr Alexander Bennet for showing such patience, devotion to duty and absolute competence in satisfying all our request.

B. THE EXPERT'S COMMENTS

2. The main ecological features of Fair Isle

There is no need to give another detailed description here of the ecological features of Fair Isle, as a very full description has already been provided in No. 25 of the European Diploma series.

Briefly stated, the island is an undulating sloping plain (rising from south to north), of old red sandstone. The coastline is very jagged, with numerous narrow inlets, headlands and sheer cliffs making the island scenery spectacular and very beautiful. Fair Isle is 25 kilometres south-south-west of the main island of the Shetlands and 30 kilometres north of the Orkneys; it covers only 9 km².

The island has only been populated for about 12,000 years, since the end of the last glacial period. Certain interesting features of its fauna reveal its geographical isolation: the wren found on the island, for example, is an endemic sub-species (Troglodytes

troglodytes fridarensis), as are the starling (Sturnus vulgaris zetlandicus) and as is the field mouse (Apodemus sylvaticus fridarensis). In contrast, there is no endemism among the flora, which comprises 38 taxa.

Ecologically speaking, a distinction may be made between three major types of land:

- cultivated and grazing land (Festuca vivipara meadows) in the south, biotopes which have been greatly modified by man;
- the Calluna vulgaris heathland in the north of the island, and the coastal salt marshes with their Plantago maritima and Armeria maritima, which are in a good natural state, despite being grazed;
- the cliffs and coastline, with quite distinctive flora and fauna.

The last two types are of the greatest interest from the point of view of both science and nature conservation (see 3.2).

2.1 Human and social aspects

The Category C European Diploma is awarded to places which combine social and recreational functions with the maintenance of valuable biological characteristics.

Our visit provided us with confirmation of what we had been told in all the documents quoted above: that the Fair Isle community and island management (particularly the NTS) have found out how to marry development harmoniously with nature conservation. Not only are the islanders pleased and proud to live in an outstanding natural environment, to which they pose no threat, but they also appear to enjoy a better quality of life than other human communities which live in apparently more favourable conditions.

This emerges very clearly, for example, from the population figures for the island. The population of Fair Isle has remained fairly stable since the Fifties, varying between the maximum of 75 in 1981 and the 1961 figure of 64, so the current population of 69 is average. This can be compared with the situation on the island of Foula (13 km²), which is similar in terms of geography and remoteness to Fair Isle: its 1931 population of 118 declined to 75 in 1951, 54 10 years later, and only 43 in 1987. A comparison of the average number of children of school age between 1971 and 1988 reveals that Foula had 5.4, while Fair Isle had 8.8 (the respective totals being 5 and 14 children in 1988). Nevertheless, the population of Fair Isle was 380 in 1861.

While it is difficult to provide economic statistics for such a small population (69 inhabitants in August 1988), it is still worth mentioning that there is no unemployment on the island, while the Shetland Islands have a 7.6% rate. Furthermore, the traditional knitwear industry is flourishing, with orders having to be placed 18 months in advance. Unfortunately, precise figures for the total numbers of visitors to the island do not exist, but the FIBOT accommodated 430 visitors per week in 1988, a figure which represents an increase of almost 4% over 1987.

There is scope for a further increase in tourism and the income this generates, which may boost islanders' earnings very considerably. There is potential, for example, for increasing the amount of accommodation available in local homes, for making the island more attractive to visitors other than bird watchers - those drawn by the socio-cultural aspects peculiar to this small community - and for intensifying and diversifying local crafts or food industries, most of the products of which can be sold to visitors by the FIBOT.

2.2 Use of natural resources

Terrestrial flora and fauna

Little use is currently made of Fair Isle's natural resources by the islanders: about one third of the island is extensively farmed (hay, barley and some food crops), and virtually all the heathlands are extensively grazed by sheep (339 head). It is thanks to grazing that a varied plant community remains, since a comparison reveals that the number of species of vegetation on the Sheep Rock has declined since grazing ceased on this (peninsula). Furthermore, there is now only a small number of families cutting peat, since the majority of households now have central or oil-fired heating. Lastly, the island has a fairly large population of wild rabbits (an introduced species), which are myxomatosis-free, but their numbers are kept down through shooting and, above all, by the cold winters.

Sea-birds

Exploitation of seabirds, a formerly widespread practice on all islands of this type, is now limited to the collection of a few herring gull (Larus argentatus) and black guillemot (Cephus grylle) eggs. The collection of herring gull eggs ought in fact to be encouraged as this species tends to proliferate at the expense of others. Guillemots are capable of laying replacement eggs, and the loss of a few of their eggs ought not to constitute a serious threat to the species.

Generally speaking, the islanders are remarkably well aware of the natural assets of their island, and proud of them; there are only two species which may cause them problems: the arctic skua (Stercorarius parasiticus) and the fulmar petrel (Fulmarus glacialis). The skua's territorial behaviour around its nest could be a source of danger to stock and even to human beings; local people allege that skuas cause the death of several lambs each year, but this has not been proved. For similar reasons, the islanders are not keen to see the fulmar spread. However, local people's antipathy to these two bird species does not at the moment present any serious threat to their survival.

Fishing

The island had a flourishing fishing industry, exporting to Germany, in the 16th century. Recreational fishing continues today, (fish and lobsters), producing very limited catches. Fishing could be developed within reasonable bounds without endangering the wealth of

marine fauna around the island, provided this does not mean competition with fish-eating birds. This would be a welcome economic development, helping to keep a dynamic population on Fair Isle, but it is only conceivable if a breakwater is built for the harbour.

2.3 Conservation of the island's main natural assets

2.3.1 Seabird colonies

Table 1 shows the population changes in the seabird colonies in recent years, making the conservation position of this vital element of Fair Isle's natural heritage clear.

Some additional details for recent years show:

- a continuing rise in the number of gannets (304 nests in 1987);
- a slight decline in the number of arctic skuas (25 pairs) and great skuas (75 pairs);
- a considerable increase in the numbers of arctic terns (211 pairs) and common terns (37 pairs);
- and an encouraging trend for black guillemots with 222 and 216 birds around the two lighthouses in 1987 (5).

The Shetland Bird Chart (8) gives a clearer view of the size of colonies and the variety of bird life on Fair Isle: 16 of the 19 species present on the archipelago breed on Fair Isle, a figure exceeded only by the island of Fetlar (which is four times larger than Fair Isle) and equalled by the island of Foula.

2.3.2 Migratory birds

Fair Isle is a very important place for a very large number of migratory birds in transit, and as such is well known by ornithologists throughout Europe. It was this, in fact, which aroused the interest of George Waterston, who purchased the island and donated it to the National Trust for Scotland, and which was one of the reasons for awarding the European Diploma to Fair Isle. This biological value attracts a good number of visitors, some of them even more regular than some of the bird species they come to observe (4). The contact between ornithologists and islanders is vital to the cultural and social health of the island.

Table 1: Size of seabird colonies on Fair Isle

Species	1978 (2)	1986 (4)
Fulmar petrel <u>Fulmarus glacialis</u>	25,000 pairs	26,995 pairs
Storm petrel <u>Hydrobates pelagicus</u>	100 "	not recorded
Gannet <u>Sula bassana</u>	30 "	258 pairs
Shag <u>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</u>	1,500 "	1,098 "
Great skua <u>Stercorarius skua</u>	25 "	84 "
Arctic skua <u>Stercorarius parasiticus</u>	116 "	115 "
Common gull <u>Larus canus</u>	>2 "	12 "
Lesser black-backed gull <u>Larus fuscus</u>	50 "	22 "
Herring gull <u>Larus argentatus</u>	300 "	262 "
Great black-backed gull <u>Larus marinus</u>	50 "	113 "
Kittiwake <u>Rissa tridactyla</u>	12,000 "	19,064 "
Common tern <u>Sterna hirundo</u>	0 ? "	26 "
Arctic tern <u>Sterna paradisaea</u>	0 "	83 "
Razorbill <u>Alca torda</u>	2,500 birds	3,950 birds
Common guillemot <u>Uria aalge</u>	20,000 "	35,181 "
Black guillemot <u>Cephus grylle</u>	160 "	367 "
Puffin <u>Fratercula arctica</u>	30,000 "	20,224 "

335 different species of birds have to date been observed on the island, and some of them are ringed for scientific purposes by FIBOT staff or volunteer workers. As well as the hundreds of species which visit regularly, some of the species observed are rare or even

exceptional in the British Isles, or even in Europe, such as off-course birds from America or Central Asia. 6,360 birds (117 species) were ringed in 1986, and the 1987 figure was 4,025 (101 species) (refs 4 and 5). The observations among the subjects covered by FIBOT's numerous scientific publications.

2.3.3 Other species of fauna

Equally noteworthy are the spectacular grey seal (Halichoerus gryphus) colonies found on the island's coasts. We saw and heard approximately 30 seals in one place, and there were even a few on the harbour jetty.

The law which protects seals is fully respected, and the fishing which takes place near the island does not pose any problems to the species. The epidemic which affected North Sea seals in the spring and summer of 1988 had not reached Fair Isle when we were there.

No species have been introduced to the island from elsewhere, not even rats, and this is crucial for the seabird colonies which nest there.

The endemic species, for their part, seem to be holding their own. The sub-species of wren is restricted by the hard winters, and its numbers remain low. It has been suggested that the Shetland starling is in decline on the island (2), but the population remains large, and the species is currently under scientific study.

We also noted the large numbers of Eider duck concentrated on the coast in August.

An attempt was made during the seventies to reintroduce the white-tailed eagle (Haliaeetus albicilla), with four birds being released. More recent success elsewhere in Scotland suggests that this experiment could be repeated.

3. Legal status and ownership

There has been no change under this heading. The NTS still owns the island, with the exception of four farms (one of them unoccupied) and the bird observatory, which belongs to the FIBOT. The land is let by the NTS, on various bases, depending on whether the lessees are islanders or companies which have constructed public service facilities (harbour, lighthouses, aero-generator, etc).

The Shetland Structure Plan, drawn up in 1979, offered Fair Isle protection in two ways:

- landscape protection, in recognition of the area's beauty, which had earned its designation as a National Scenic Area;
- national or international protection for its natural heritage, primarily for its birds, but also for its botanical value [72% of the island is designated as an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)].

4. Management

The NTS is the main management body, but other organisations have an important part to play:

- the Countryside Commission - CSC, which is responsible for National Scenic Areas;
- the Nature Conservancy Council, which deals with the SSSI;
- the Shetland Islands Council, as a financial partner in numerous development projects,
- Fair Isle Committee responsible for internal administration.
- an important role is played by several other administrative committees (Fair Isle electricity Committee, grazing committee etc...).

4.1 Management activities

The island is still managed in a fairly flexible way, with the NTS giving directions which the islanders carry out. Management is mainly a matter of traditional farming, using old-established techniques which make no use of chemicals.

The common grazing land is managed with a view to maintaining the limit on the numbers of livestock (a maximum of 21 head of sheep per family, with an actual total of 339). This means that there is no over-grazing. The spread of bracken (Pteridium aquilinum), however, is a matter for increasing concern and could one day give rise to specific management action. It has been suggested that the effectiveness of manual control (repeated cutting) be evaluated; while this is very costly in terms of manpower and time, it is the only alternative to selective herbicides, which have to be ruled out.

A plan to re-seed the heathland, dating from several years ago, has been dropped; the NCC did not accept it, and the operation was in any case considered too costly in relation to the benefit it was hoped to achieve.

An important aspect of management is the considerable effort made by the NTS to make life in every house on the island more comfortable. Some are to be extended, some sanitation is to be modernised, and Auld Haa, the oldest house on the island (which is listed), is to be restored to accommodate another family. It should also be noted that the shop and adjoining public toilets have been renovated (the work was completed just before our visit) and the community hall extended; both are vital meeting places. Lastly, two small houses specially designed for elderly people have been built, in the hope that other houses will be freed for young couples, who will farm the land allocated to each traditional home. It should also be noted that the condition of the Puffin Hotel, where young volunteer workers are accommodated every summer, has been improved.

Although the FIBOT has no official management responsibility, it acts as scientific adviser, offers accommodation facilities for visitors and is responsible for the major means of promoting the island as a destination for nature-loving tourists. Hence the involvement of the NTS in several FIBOT publications.

5. Management plan

This has just been completed by the NTS and submitted to the bodies involved in management of the island (CSC and NCC); it has not yet been approved. The people of Fair Isle were also directly involved in drawing it up. It is subject to review after five years.

The following priority objectives are defined in the plan:

- a. preservation of the essential character of the island;
- b. maintenance of a balanced and self-sufficient community as a vital factor in safeguarding the island's character and environment;
- c. promotion of necessary infrastructure and facilities using the island's resources, without jeopardising objectives a and b;
- d. encouragement of tourism on the island, at a level and for purposes which will not give rise to conflict with the community or with the preservation of the island's environment;
- e. concerted efforts to meet the conditions on which the European diploma was awarded.

5.1 Staff and infrastructure

Alex Bennet is the Factor, managing the island on behalf of the NTS; he has excellent relations with the islanders, visits Fair Isle regularly (approximately once every three months for a few days) and was the instigator of the draft management plan.

NCS and CSC officials also visit the island from time to time. The only permanent staff on Fair Isle is that of the FIBOT, but a staff increase is warranted by both the need to supervise the bird observatory and the numerous (existing or future) responsibilities. The NTS could be advised to place someone permanently on the island to be responsible for management and conservation, thus improving the links between the island and its managers. The person concerned could also play an important part in further developing the educational function and the research carried out on the island, as well as helping, for example, with ringing programmes and the monitoring of nesting bird populations, in cooperation with the FIBOT.

5.2 Research

Virtually all research activities are carried out by the FIBOT, which produces annual reports not only on birds, but also on insects, fungi, Bryophyta, Cetacea, marine biology, palaeontology, etc.

The FIBOT, which accommodates the vast majority of visitors to the island, provides an excellent setting for fruitful discussions between specialists. Nevertheless, it would be worth carrying out some more specific studies (see part B, by the Secretariat), but these require outside help, as the FIBOT officials cannot take on any more tasks.

In addition to the FIBOT's own research, the NCC is currently co-ordinating a general research project on United Kingdom seabirds (the Seabird Monitoring Scheme), and the FIBOT is actively involved in this.

Very detailed archaeological studies have also covered the artefacts visible on the island, making it possible to piece together the ground-plan of the ruined water mill near the FIBOT building, for example. This will be extremely useful when this valuable part of the cultural heritage is restored, as is planned in the near future and is recommended in Resolution (85) 14.

6. Problems and needs

6.1 Economic development

The main objective of the management plan is to boost the island's economy and population by attracting new families to Fair Isle. Given the fact that maximum use is already being made of the farmland, other sources of income must be found for young couples. Some have already adopted an imaginative approach (traditional wooden boats are being built, and there is a plan to start market gardening under glass, for example). The traditional knitwear industry cannot provide a full-time occupation to support a family, and its current cooperative structure could not be bettered.

There is potential for the development of local fishing, tourism and associated activities (guided visits, accommodation and the local production of food and craft souvenirs). But this can only be done if more reliable links with the Shetlands exist, for which the construction of a breakwater is a prerequisite.

What is more, new houses will have to be built if the population of the island is to be increased. Priority will have to be given to renovating old homes, and new building will have to be appropriate to the island's character and landscape. Two homes specially designed for elderly people have been built, but only one is occupied. The islanders are attached to their homes and their jobs, and the idea of retirement does not appeal to them.

7. Threats to the natural environment

As birds are still the island's main asset, we very carefully scrutinised the potential dangers to which they are exposed.

There is a real problem of domestic cats which have returned to the wild preying on birds; we observed some droppings. The number of domestic cats ought to be kept in check, and their reproduction controlled, although this problem does not yet seem to have become too great. Stray cats ought to be destroyed when rabbits are shot.

It seems that the most serious problem is the quite marked decline in seabird reproduction, which appears to be the result of intensive fishing for sand eels (*Ammodytes sp*) throughout the region, particularly in the area around Fair Isle, which is the spawning ground for shoals of this species each spring. It is certainly the very abundance of this fish which accounts for the

thriving seabird colonies, most of which (eg puffins, terns, kittiwakes, etc) feed almost exclusively on it. 1988 was the worst spawning year ever recorded for these species, and it is difficult not to draw a parallel with the decline in the profitability of sand-eel fishing in the same region.

The table below shows sand-eel catch figures for the Shetlands and illustrates the alarming decrease in stocks in recent years.

Year	Tonnes of fish
1981	40,731
1982	45,575
1983	33,452
1984	32,579
1985	17,223
1986	11,960
1987	8,141

Sand-eel fishing started less than 15 years ago, and the fish is turned into livestock meal. The fish sells at £30.60 per ton, which contrasts with the £846.18 paid for cod, £707.94 for haddock, £555.17 for whiting, £120.05 for herring and £105.79 for mackerel (3).

Considering that little can be earned from this fishing, that overfishing has led to declining profitability and that there have been serious repercussions for the birds of European importance which nest locally, the justification for this activity must be questioned. The situation is all the more distressing bearing in mind that this fish is being used to manufacture animal feed, at a time when the European Community is currently overproducing milk and meat.

What is more, this problem must not be regarded as an exclusively local issue, limited to the Shetland Islands ; it is in fact a problem of regional management and of the exploitation of resources which are crucial at European level. It must never be forgotten that protected areas are part of larger ecological zones and can only be managed efficiently if regional, and even national, policies have a conservation dimension.

8. Repercussions of the award of the European Diploma

8.1 Conditions attached to the award

The conditions attached to the award are listed in Resolution (85) 14 and now, five years on, it is appropriate to consider the action which has been taken in respect of each condition.

Construction of a breakwater

We have several times emphasised the important need for a better boat service between Fair Isle and the main island of the Shetlands, particularly in winter, when weather conditions make an air service impossible. We have also stressed the foreseeable indirect economic effects of the construction of a breakwater: these would come mainly from increased tourism and the possible development of local commercial fishing.

It has been estimated that a breakwater would cost £3,000,000. While some progress has been made in obtaining the necessary funds from various bodies, the size of the sum required is the reason why this recommendation has not yet been put into effect. However, we

must emphasise the need to do everything possible to carry out this project, which is economically and socially vital to the islanders and which alone can guarantee the long-term presence of a permanent human community on Fair Isle.

Nevertheless, this recommendation is accompanied by a call for prudence. The effects of building a breakwater could in fact be damaging to both the landscape and the very quality of the environment.

The building materials will have to be brought in, as the stone on the island is not of a sufficiently high quality. What is more, every effort will have to be made to prevent the construction operations themselves from devastating either the landscape or natural sites which are important to the bird life or the coastal and marine ecosystems. The indirect consequences for fishing and tourism must also be assessed, with a view to avoiding any damage to fauna and to the very basis of the island's natural assets. We therefore feel that it would be advisable to carry out a detailed impact study so that the project can be better supervised and potential problems avoided, although we believe that the dangers are limited when compared with the foreseeable benefits.

Development without risk to the natural heritage

This concern has been, and continues to be, taken into account, thus largely justifying the renewal of the Diploma, on the understanding that priority will continue to be given to avoiding damage to the natural heritage.

The development of the oil industry depends on the geological knowledge of the seabed. The oil deposits are to the north east and east of the Shetland archipelago, quite a long way from the island, and Fair Isle is in no immediate danger.

Maintaining the SSSI at its present size

This recommendation has been applied to the letter, with the SSSI covering approximately 72% of the island, only excluding certain parts of the south east of the island which are also of some botanical importance. The plan to re-seed common grazing land has therefore been dropped, and the NCC has paid relatively large sums to the islanders by way of compensation. There is therefore no need for any specific recommendation on this subject, particularly if we bear in mind the islanders' highly ecological attitude and desire to protect the natural environment.

George Waterston Memorial Centre

The fifth recommendation in Resolution (85) 14 covered the completion of the information and interpretation centre named after the man who purchased the island. We were delighted to note the great success of this excellent museum, which houses artefacts from the island's recent past and illustrates local cultural aspects (crafts and lifestyle) and natural treasures. The very friendly and extremely competent attendants are local people, a fact which leads to even greater social and friendly contact between visitors and islanders. Admission to the centre is free, but voluntary donations are welcomed.

The centre is in fact a dynamic museum, to which everyone feels attached, as the local people make direct contributions to it in the form of donations, while the school pupils themselves prepare various exhibitions.

The centre could be further extended, and sufficient material could certainly be found to document such fields as archaeology, natural resources of every kind and fishing. The current premises are too small to take any more material, but there are some buildings in the south of the island which could be made available once the nearby lighthouse has been automated. In this context, it must be emphasised that the buildings adjoining the lighthouse must be preserved, with a view to their use either as accommodation for new families or for other community activities.

Restoration of the cultural heritage

The sixth recommendation related to the restoration of the water-mills, maize-drier and dry stone walls between plots of land. The two last-named artefacts have been restored. It would be possible to put up a small, discreet sign near the drier explaining its purpose. The inventories and publications produced by the University of Bradford and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland have enabled the plans of the water mills to be redrawn, and these will be invaluable for restoration purposes (at least one of the three will be restored in the next few years). Again, a small explanatory sign for visitors would be welcome.

We should observe at this point that we witnessed the setting up of two new notices at the two places where visitors arrive on the island, one at the airport and the other at the harbour. These explain what a National Scenic Area is and point out that the island is of enormous biological interest and that respect is due to both the site and the islanders. Our only regret is that the award of the European Diploma is not mentioned, but that is something of which the islanders are very proud, and a copy of the diploma is on display in the community hall.

The inhabitants have also prepared a map for visitors to the island, on which the Diploma is mentioned. Finally, it should also be noted that not just on the island, but throughout the Shetlands archipelago, people are well aware of the honour bestowed upon Fair Isle.

9. The expert's conclusions

In the light of this on-the-spot appraisal, there is no doubt that Fair Isle satisfies the criteria for the renewal for a further five-year period of the Category C diploma, given the regional, national and European value of the site thanks to the continuation of human activities which respect its natural assets.

However, we shall attach to this decision the following recommendations, which we submit to the Committee of Experts - Protected Areas:

- conditions 1, 2 and 6 of Resolution (85) 14, which are general objectives still valid for the future management of the island, should be retained;

- particular attention should be paid to the protection of the island's immediate surroundings; there should be no intensive fishing, and consideration should be given to the possibility of setting up full marine reserves in certain places to play a crucial role in safeguarding the island's rich variety of bird life. This would be particularly useful in the north-west, in the areas where shoals of sand-eels spawn and in the places where the seabird colonies and seals are most abundant.

C. FURTHER COMMENTS BY THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat agrees with all the above, but would like to add some points of information.

10. Protection of the natural terrestrial environment

A large part of the island (72%) is classified as an SSSI, on account of its botanical value and especially because of the abundance of clumps of Juniperus nana. Any plan which affects this area has to be submitted to the NCC for approval. Hence the rejection of the plan to re-seed the common grazing land, for which the islanders were granted compensation (almost £2,000 to cover 25 years). The plan would in fact have required major works in the fields and drainage operations which would have significantly altered the natural character of this area, without any guarantee of the hoped-for improvement in grazing quality.

While this project was fortunately dropped, two other possible threats to the site must be considered: it might be overrun by bracken, and there is a risk of over-grazing.

Bracken, Pteridium aquilinum, has been advancing fairly insidiously over several years, but to an extent that has been noted by most of the islanders. Its spread is disturbing, as sheep will neither graze nor tread on this plant, so the amount of land which can be used for grazing is declining.

It is difficult to know what attitude to adopt to this threat, but closer monitoring of changes in the situation is definitely necessary, if possible coupled with an experimental approach. It has been suggested that repeated selective cutting over three consecutive years could eliminate this plant; it is therefore recommended that the success of this technique be judged on the basis of a small area, where volunteer workers might be used, since this is very time-consuming work. In any case, selective herbicides must be prohibited - these might well lead to major changes in the plant life of the area and give rise to residue problems.

Mr Broggi, the expert who visited the island in 1983, pointed out at that stage that there was evidence of over-grazing on the common grazing land (SN-ZP (84) 24). There is still roughly the same number of sheep on the island, but it is important that the changing situation should be closely monitored in order to guarantee the long-term survival of the grazing land which is vital to the island's economy. Comparative research could also be carried out into changing

plant cover, looking at areas which are grazed and those where there are no sheep (eg Sheep Rock, which has been unused for between six and eight years). The amount of time needed for heather to regenerate ought to be determined, so that a grazing rotation system can if necessary be worked out, guaranteeing that this plant continues to flourish. Sheep graze only the young shoots of these plants, resulting in a plant ageing process.

Juniperus nana, which is more common on Fair Isle than the other Shetland islands, is the major focus of botanical interest in the SSSI. We only saw a few plants of this species during our visit, and it would be well to make sure that it survives.

Lastly, it would be a good idea not to use all of the island's peat, and to consider preserving a good proportion of it, both because of its biological value and for its potential benefit for the purposes of tourism and culture.

11. The natural marine environment

As already stated, one of the most serious problems facing Fair Isle is that of control of the nearby activities which affect it to a greater or lesser extent. We need to consider two such activities:

- oil drilling and the associated risks, primarily to the island's birds,
- intensive fishing and its repercussions for seabird colonies and for the islanders' prospects of developing small-scale commercial fishing.

It is difficult for Fair Isle to exercise any control over the development of oil wells in the North Sea. There were originally plans for three new drilling platforms relatively close to the island, but this threat has for the moment been lifted. There is, however, a continued need for vigilance, as the prevailing currents would bring any pollution from this area towards Fair Isle. What is more, following the Piper Alpha disaster off Aberdeen, a number of black guillemot chicks were found covered in oil, and a good many seabirds perished.

The problem of intensive sand-eel fishing has already been mentioned. The lack of any controlled fishing zone in the immediate vicinity of the island is regrettable. We believe that the creation of an integral marine reserve covering at least some of the area immediately surrounding Fair Isle would be a very important step towards offering a long-term guarantee of protection of the island's marine fauna and bird-life. It is no longer possible to regard Fair Isle as a self-contained entity; it is an ecosystem in a marine environment, and the two are interdependent. This area to which the Diploma was awarded ought to be protected more as an ecosystem.

In any case, there is a need for scientific study of the changing numbers of sand-eels and of the effects of fishing on the seabird colonies.

A marine reserve would also be a potential source of income for the island, as diving facilities for tourists could be developed. Furthermore, a considerable economic boost could be given by the development of a small-scale local fishing industry, but this would require an absence of competition between the present intensive fishing industry and the Fair Isle fishermen.

12. Visitor reception and the provision of information

We had an opportunity, during our visit, to enjoy a video film showing the life and natural resources of Fair Isle during the Sixties, a film made by the former FIBOT secretary. A colour guide to the island has also been published this year, and we hope that it will be widely distributed, making visitors to the Shetlands aware of the island's beauty and cultural richness.

If there were to be a new information and interpretation centre for visitors, it would be a good idea to explain the island's interdependence with the surrounding sea and to provide more information about Fair Isle's natural resources, geology and history.

It would be worthwhile improving visitor reception and the information service, in order to attract tourists who respect the environment, but this would be bound to entail appointing temporary or permanent staff attached to the FIBOT, for example. There is good potential for broadening the range of visitors to the island to include people other than seasoned bird-watchers and people keen to sight rare birds. Fair Isle has a lot to offer as an example of a rural community living in harmony with its environment.

13. Draft resolution renewing the Diploma

In conclusion, we propose that the Category C diploma be renewed, to be accompanied by the following recommendations which sum up the comments made by the appointed expert and the Secretariat.

Draft Resolution

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15 a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (85) 14 on the award of the European Diploma to the Fair Isle National Scenic Area;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Renews until ... the European Diploma, Category C, awarded to the Fair Isle National Scenic Area;

Addresses the following recommendations to the authorities which are responsible for management of the site:

1. A breakwater should be constructed, once an impact study has been carried out with a view to minimising damage to the landscape and to the island's terrestrial and marine flora and fauna in order to ensure a permanent link with the main island of the Shetlands;
2. Research into aspects of the changing plant cover, particularly the spread of bracken, the signs of over-grazing and the abundance of Juniperus nana, should be intensified;
3. Protection should be reinforced and extended to the seas around the island, if possible through the creation of an integral marine reserve, and there should be scientific study of the development of the sand-eel population near the island;
4. The continued existence of an active population on the island should be guaranteed, by ensuring that there are economic activities which are compatible with respect for the natural environment and by developing housing which is in keeping with the beauty of the landscape;
5. The educational role of the area should be developed, with the help of an activity leader ; an increase in FIBOT staff; the natural environment section of the museum should be developed if possible, particularly on the subject of the interrelationship between the island and the marine environment;
6. The typical features of the cultural heritage, such as the water-mills, the Auld Haa and the lighthouses and associated buildings, should be restored and rehabilitated.

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