



The Scars, Cresswell © NBP Photographer John Williamson



## Rocky Shore, Reefs & Islands Habitat Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Coastal Group
Plan Author	Aisling Lannin
Plan Lead	European Marine Site
Latest version	January 2008

The Farne Isles are a rare group of volcanic Whin stone offshore rocky islands and their relatively undisturbed nature makes them a haven for birds (e.g. guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes) and for grey seals.

### Description

This plan refers to 'rocky reefs'; both the rock surfaces that are exposed along the shoreline and out to sea above low tide and those that remain covered by high tide in the sublittoral zone (below the level of the lowest tide to the ocean bottom up to 6 nautical miles from the coast). Where rock surfaces are exposed on the coast at low tide they are often referred to as rocky shores. Rocky reefs come in a variety of types such as cobbles, vertical rock walls and horizontal ledges, areas of broken bedrock and boulder fields. These provide diverse habitats for marine plants and animals, both above the low water mark and below. Reefs are home to a diverse and important part of the marine ecosystem including kelp beds that are a key species for biodiversity, and algal communities that form the basis of many marine food chains. Northumberland rocky reefs are a primary reason for the designation of the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site, making them of national and European importance. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) identifies the Northumberland coast rocky reefs as the most diverse known on the North Sea coast.

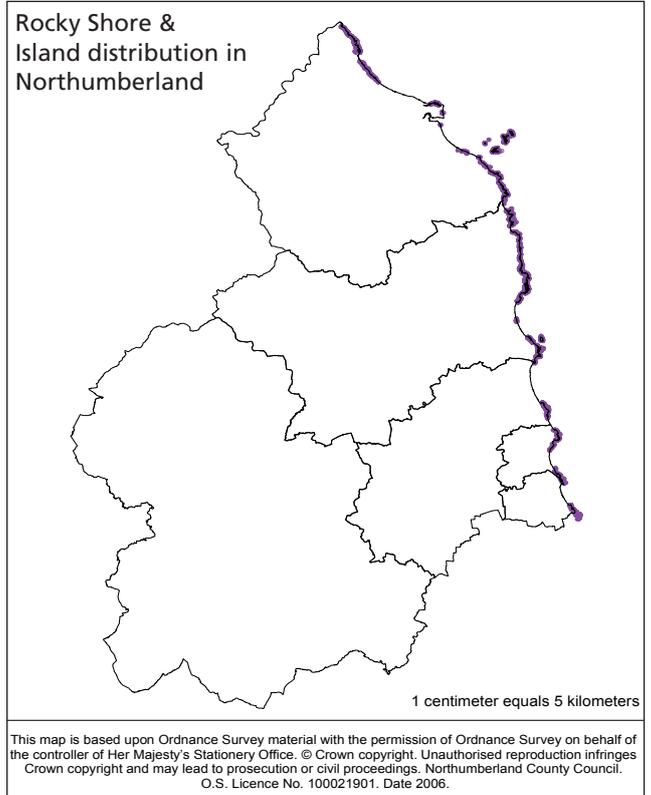
Sheltered limestone rocky shores are rare in the UK but are found along the Northumberland coast. Biogenic reefs created by the burrowing worm *Sabellaria spinulosa* also occur in the waters off the Northumberland coast (3 of 14 UK sites). This species has considerable influence on the biodiversity living on or in the sea bed and is a keystone habitat structuring species.

This plan also includes headlands, sea stacks and sea caves. Sea caves are associated with areas of reef and can include tunnels or caverns. They are found on the rocky shore in the intertidal zone and below the sea surface in the subtidal zone. They provide an important habitat for distinct biological communities and are another reason for the designation of the European Marine Site.

### Conservation Status

EC Habitats Directive, Annex 1 - Reefs  
 Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site  
 - Special Area of Conservation (SAC)  
 Farne Islands Special Protection Area  
 Coquet Island Special Protection Area  
 UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat – *Sabellaria spinulosa* reefs  
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats

### Current Extent in Northumberland



## Rocky Shore, Reefs & Islands Habitat Action Plan

The rocky shore and islands in Northumberland cover approximately 929 hectares.

Lindisfarne has approximately 3,679 hectares of rocky reef with the reefs covering two coasts of the island.

The Farne Islands contains 15 to 28 islands depending on the tide and these are divided into an inner and outer group. The distance from the mainland varies from 2.5 to 7.5 kilometres.

From Dunstanburgh Head to Cullernose Point, the blue-grey columnar basalt of the Whin Sill outcrops to form a series of cliffs and steep rocky shores.

The Emblestones are a chain of raised reefs that extend from the shore at Low Newton and are exposed at low tide and partially covered at high tide.

Coquet island is located 1km off the coast of Amble and covers an area of approximately 6 hectares. The island is surrounded by low sandstone cliffs and a broad rock platform at low tide.

The Cresswell & Newbiggin foreshore SSSI contains exposures of fluvial sandstone and marine shale at low tide.

Sheltered limestone rocky shores are found at Cocklawburn, Ness End (northern Holy Island), and the shore adjacent to Seahouses golf course and at Coquet Island.

Sea caves are found in the sandstone cliffs of Berwick, in the limestone at Howick, and on the north side of Lindisfarne. Submerged sea caves, tunnels and arches occur in the volcanic rock off the Farne Islands.

### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Oil spills
- Aggregate extraction
- Shoreline management – structures that influence natural processes of the shore
- Mooring – anchoring for dive or pleasure boats and commercial boats
- Fishing – this is the biggest threat to *Sabellaria spinulosa* reefs
- Invasive species – *Caprella mutica* threat to biogenic reefs

### Associated Action Plans

Coastal Birds  
Common Seal  
Grey Seal

### Further Information

This rocky shore, reefs and island action plan links to the littoral rock, inshore sublittoral rock and supralittoral rock UK BAP broad habitat action plans. It also links to the *Sabellaria spinulosa* UK BAP action plan, whose lead partner is Natural England.

Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site - [www.xbordercurrents.com](http://www.xbordercurrents.com)

Fortune, F & Quigley, M, 2001, Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site Management Scheme

The Habitats Directive: selection of Special Areas of Conservation in the UK - <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=1457>

Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership, Explore the Geology and Landscape of the Northumberland Coast AONB

Connor, D.W, Allen, J.H, Golding, N, Howell, K.L, Lieberknecht, L.M, Northen, K.O and Reker, J.B (2004) The Marine Habitat Classification for Britain and Ireland Version 04.05 JNCC, Peterborough. ISBN 1 861 07561 8 (internet version) - <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1645>

### Targets

**Maintain the current extent of rocky shore, reefs and islands in Northumberland by 2010 (no net loss)**

**Maintain the condition of rocky shore and islands in Northumberland currently assessed as favourable by 2010.**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
RSRI A01	Promote the sea shore code through articles and events	ongoing
RSRI A02	Create a code of conduct for all anchoring boats	2008
RSRI A03	Ensure the proposed Marine Bill affords adequate protection for reef habitats	2008
RSRI A04	Raise awareness about the importance and management of Northumberland's rocky shore, reefs and islands and their associated species through promotional material, events and training	ongoing
RSRI A05	Create a code of practice for rock pooling activities for use by all nature conservation organisations in Northumberland	2008
RSRI A06	Carry out assessments of the impacts of the cockling, musseling and winkling industry on the habitat	2009