

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7, as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Note for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers are strongly urged to provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:**Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 29 March 1999

3. Country:

UK (Scotland)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

North Uist Machair and Islands

5. Map of site included:Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps.**a) hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no***b) digital (electronic) format** (optional): Yes

6. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

57 32 00 N

07 22 45 W

7. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Nearest town/city: Lochmaddy

North Uist Machair and Islands lies on the west and north coasts of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides.

Administrative region: Western Isles / Na h-Eileanan an Iar

8. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **9. Area** (hectares): 4704.92

Min. -1

Max. 96

Mean 10

10. Overview:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

North Uist Machair and Islands Ramsar site comprises a number of machair areas, which show a range of habitats, from intertidal sand and rock through sand dunes and dune slacks to a calcareous coastal plain and acid grassland. The site contains a range of freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs; important freshwater marshes and fens; wet and dry machair and saltmarsh. These areas are important for their breeding and wintering waterfowl. The machair on Robach and Newton SSSI is also notable for its geomorphological landforms within the sand dune and machair system.

11. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

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Secretariat comment: The RIS provides information requiring the application of Criterion 4. This needs to be included in the next update.

12. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 11. above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Dunlin, <i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i> , Baltic/UK/Ireland (br)	271 pairs, representing an average of 1% of the biogeographic breeding population (1999-2000, 2003)
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Species with peak counts in winter:

Barnacle goose, <i>Branta leucopsis</i> , Greenland/Ireland, UK (w)	1422 individuals, representing an average of 2.6% of the biogeographic population (5 year peak mean for 1996/7-2000/01)
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Species/populations identified subsequent to designation

Species with peak counts in winter:

Greylag goose, <i>Anser anser anser</i> , Iceland/UK, Ireland	1861 individuals, representing an average of 1,8% of the biogeographic population (5 year peak mean for 1996/7-2000/01)
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Contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which is updated annually. See www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm.

13. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

14. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	acidic, basic, neutral, shingle, sand, mud, peat, nutrient-rich, nutrient-poor, metamorphic, gravel, pebble, cobble, boulder
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, island, coastal, slope, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), open coast (including bay), enclosed coast (including embayment), pools, intertidal rock
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	acidic, alkaline, circumneutral
Salinity	fresh, saline / euhaline
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Stornoway, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/stornoway.html) Max. daily temperature: 11.0° C Min. daily temperature: 5.6° C Days of air frost: 30.7 Rainfall: 1231.7 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1216.8

General description of the Physical Features:

North Uist Machair and Islands is a coastal site encompassing areas of rocky shore, sandy beaches and dunes, cultivated machair, saltmarsh, calcareous coastal plains and acid grassland. There are also important freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs, marshes and fens, and wet machair.

15. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

North Uist Machair and Islands is a coastal site encompassing areas of rocky shore, sandy beaches and dunes, cultivated machair, saltmarsh, calcareous coastal plains and acid grassland. There are also important freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs, marshes and fens, and wet machair.

16. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

No special values known

17. Wetland types

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
D	Rocky shores	5
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	52.5
H	Salt marshes	0.5
O	Freshwater lakes: permanent	2
Tp	Freshwater marshes / pools: permanent	5
Other	Other	35

18. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site.

North Uist Machair and Islands comprises four sites on the west and north coasts of North Uist, and all or part of three islands in the Sound of Harris. All these components are dominated by sand dune and machair systems. The machair plain includes wet and dry machair, some of which is uncultivated. Associated with the machair are fine examples of nutrient-rich fen, marsh and bog, eutrophic machair lochs, saltmarsh and sandy and rocky shores. The site supports a rich and diverse range of plant communities and includes some locally or nationally scarce plants and bryophytes. The coast, machair lochs and acidic blackland are of considerable ornithological importance for wintering and breeding birds.

19. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Assemblage

This site is internationally important because it contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I features:

- H1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines
- H1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*)
- H2110 Embryonic shifting dunes
- H2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (“white dunes”)
- H2130 Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation (“grey dunes”)
- H2190 Humid dune slacks
- H21A0 Machairs
- H3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation

Internationally important species occurring on the site.

- S1833 *Najas flexilis* Slender naiad (Habitats Directive Annex II species)

Nationally important species occurring on the site.**Higher Plants.**

Dactylorhiza majalis scotica, *Equisetum variegatum*, *Potamogeton filiformis*, *Potamogeton rutilus*, *Potamogeton coloratus*, *Potamogeton friesii*, *Pilularia globulifera*, *Mertensia maritima*, and *Juncus balticus*

Lower Plants.

Chara spp., *Drepanocladus sendtneri*, *Drepanocladus polygamus*, *Tortella fragilis*, *Distichium inclinatum*, *Meesia uliginosa*, *Campylium elodes* and *Amblyodon dealbatus*.

20. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Birds**Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species regularly supported during the breeding season:**

Ringed plover, *Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*, 240 pairs, representing an average of 2% of the breeding population (3 year mean, 1993-1995)
breeding in southern Scandinavia/Baltic, British Isles, N & E continental Europe; wintering in Europe, Med. & N Africa

Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , NW & C Europe	13 pairs, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (Count for 1992, 1995)
Corn crake , <i>Crex crex</i> , Europe	33 individuals, representing an average of 5.6% of the GB population (1998-2002)
Eurasian oystercatcher , <i>Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus</i> , Europe & NW Africa -wintering	928 pairs, representing an average of 2.8% of the GB population (1999-2000, 2003)
Common redshank , <i>Tringa totanus brittanica</i> , Britain & Ireland breeding	521 pairs, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (1999-2000, 2003)
Little tern , <i>Sterna albifrons albifrons</i> , W Europe	54 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 2.7% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)
Species with peak counts in winter:	
Ringed plover, <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> , Europe/Northwest Africa	295 individuals, representing an average of 0.9% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Sanderling , <i>Calidris alba</i> , Eastern Atlantic	335 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Ruddy turnstone, <i>Arenaria interpres interpres</i> , NE Canada, Greenland/W Europe & NW Africa	215 individuals, representing an average of 0.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Purple sandpiper , <i>Calidris maritima maritima</i> , E Atlantic -wintering	191 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species Information

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Invertebrates.

Bombus distinguendus.

21. Social and cultural values:

e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

- Aesthetic
- Archaeological/historical site
- Environmental education/ interpretation
- Livestock grazing
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Other
- Sport fishing
- Sport hunting
- Tourism
- Traditional cultural

22. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
National/Crown Estate	+	
Private	+	
Public/communal	+	

23. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site

Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Collection of non-timber natural products: commercial	+	+
Collection of non-timber natural products: subsistence	+	+
Cutting of vegetation (small-scale/subsistence)	+	+
Fishing: commercial	+	+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	+
Shifting arable agriculture	+	
Rough or shifting grazing	+	+
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	+
Hay meadows	+	+
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Domestic water supply	+	+

24. Factors adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?
No factors reported	NA				

For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

25. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	

Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation	+	
Management agreement	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Other	+	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	

26. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

27. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Birds.

- Corncrake surveys (RSPB/SNH) annual.
- Birds on RSPB reserve monitored every year.
- Breeding wader surveys in 1983, 1995 & 2000, wintering wader survey 1994-95 and 2004. Various national BTO surveys.
- Feasibility study for mink eradication, 1999
- Ongoing research into effects of hedgehogs on ground nesting birds (2000)
- Annual (Feb) barnacle goose count.

Invertebrates.

Survey of *Bombus distinguendus* in 1997, 2000

Habitat.

Freshwater vegetation surveyed in 1995. Machair vegetation surveyed 1995, 1988.

Machair and Freshwater Site Condition Monitoring 2004. Intertidal/marine Site Condition Monitoring 2004.

28. Current conservation education:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

The RSPB reserve at Balranald has a small visitor centre with interpretive panels and displays. There is a reserve leaflet and the RSPB hold guided walks during the summer for visitors and organised parties. The Balranald site has also been used to demonstrate habitat management for corncrakes to a variety of people and organisations.

29. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

- Walking, including dog walking, birdwatching and mammal watching occur, at a fairly low level, over much of the site, all year. An exception to this, is the Balranald area which is an RSPB reserve and receives reasonably large numbers of visitors mainly in the summer. Visitors are asked to keep to a marked trail to avoid disturbance to breeding birds.
- Angling occurs from both shore and boat. Again this mainly occurs from April to September.
- North Uist Estates shoot over the parts of the site they own, whilst a syndicate of local crofters shoots over some of the SEERAD-owned ground at Balranald. Season 12 August to 20 February inclusive.

30. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Scottish Executive, Environment and Rural Affairs Department

31. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP

32. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 13 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

- Bainbridge, I, Walker, D & Gray, M (1994) *Winter bird surveys on proposed Special Protection Areas in Scotland*. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (unpublished report to Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh)
- Barne, JH, Robson, CF, Kaznowska, SS, Doody, JP, Davidson, NC & Buck, AL (eds.) (1997) *Coasts and seas of the United Kingdom. Regions 15 & 16. North-west Scotland: the Western Isles and west Highland*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. (Coastal Directories Series.)
- Booth, AB & Milne, F (1999) Western Isles corncrake habitat survey. (Contactor: Central Environmental Surveys.) *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report*, No. F99LC03
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- Ritchie, W (1971) *The beaches of Barra and the Uists. A survey of the beach, dune and machair areas of Barra, South Uist, North Uist and Berneray*. University of Aberdeen, Department of Geography, for Countryside Commission for Scotland, Perth. [Reprinted 2004 as *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report*, No. 047]
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