Designation date: 24/07/85 Ramsar Site no. 317

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) – 2009-2012 version

Available for download from http://www.ramsar.org/ris/key_ris_index.htm.

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes 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. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.

3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Knut Fossum, The Governor
of Svalbard, teleph.no +47 79 02 43 00, e.mail:
firmapost@sysselmannen.no

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DD MM YY

Designation date | Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:
March 2012

3. Country:
Norway

4. Name of the Ramsar site:
The precise name of the designated site in one of the three official languages (English, French or Spanish) of the Convention. Alternative names, including in local language(s), should be given in parentheses after the precise name.
Gåsøyane
International No. 317, National No. 14

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for (tick one box only)**:**
a) Designation of a new Ramsar site ❑; or
b) Updated information on an existing Ramsar site ☑

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area

The Ramsar site boundary and site area are unchanged: ❑

or

If the site boundary has changed:

i) the boundary has been delineated more accurately ☑ or

ii) the boundary has been extended ❑; or

iii) the boundary has been restricted** ❑

and/or

If the site area has changed:

i) the area has been measured more accurately ☑ ; or

ii) the area has been extended ❑; or

iii) the area has been reduced** ❑

** **Important note**: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

Minor adjustments of data and management are performed in the RIS.

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7. Map of site:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

i**) a hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): ☑;

ii**) an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) ☑;

iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** ❑.

b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park, etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The boundary is the same as the Gåsøyane Nature Reserve established July 1th 1973.

The site is composed of three separate islands. Sea areas in a distance of 300 m from the islands at lowest tide are enclosed in the site.

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8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude, in degrees and minutes):

Provide the coordinates of the approximate centre of the site and/or the limits of the site. If the site is composed of more than one separate area, provide coordinates for each of these areas.

78º 28'N 16º 15'E.

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9. General location:

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

Gåsøyane is located in Billefjorden, a part of the larger fiord Isfjorden in central Spitsbergen, approximately 40 km northeast of Longyearbyen. Longyearbyen is the administration centre of Svalbard with approx. 2000 inhabitants (2008).

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10. Elevation: (in metres: average and/or maximum & minimum)
0 – 4 m.a.s.l.

11. Area: (in hectares)
236 ha of which approx.. 190 ha is sea area.

12. General overview of the site:
Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

This type of small islands without presence of Polar Fox *Alopex lagopus* are important breeding areas for arctic geese and Common Eider *Somateria melissima.*

13. Ramsar Criteria:
Tick the box under 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). All Criteria which apply should be ticked.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
❑	❑	☑	☑	❑	☑	❑	❑	❑

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 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).

Criterion 3: This group of islands are traditional breeding sites for Brent Geese *Branta bernicla hrota* Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* (23 pair in 1996) and Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, characteristic species for this kind of archipelago in the biogeographic region.

Criterion 4: The archipelago provides breeding sites for birds: see justification of Criterion 3 and point 22.

Criterion 6. The site supports more than 1% of the individuals in a population of Common Eider *Somateria molissima* (800-900 pairs, with 912 males registered in 1996, Svalbard, Franz Joseph population). The 1 % threshold is 600 individuals. Probably the site also fulfills the 1% threshold for Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*. Yearly approximate 130 pairs breed in the site (385 pair in 1996). The 1% threshold is 270 individuals for the Barnacle Geese

15. 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:
1- MATZ – middle arctic tundra zone
2 - Arctic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):
1- Zonal division based on the distribution of thermophilius vascular plant species. Vascular plants abundant on Svalbard are divided into five groups based on temperature demands and the distribution of these groups of species have been surveyed in 163 areas (In: Elvebakk, A. (1997): Tundra diversity and ecological characteristics of Svalbard. In: Wiegolaski, F.E. (ed.): Polar and alpine tundra. Ecosystems of the world 3: 347-359. Elsevier.

2 - Biogeographical regions, Europe 2005, European Environment Agency, (http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/biogeographical-regions-europe-2005-with-national-boundaries)

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16. 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.

The islands consist of dolerite of Jurassic-Cretaceous age. The surrounding sea areas are shallow. The shoreline around the islands consists partly of cliffs, partly of sandy shores. The land areas consist of bare rock and some areas covered with marine deposits. The islands are partly covered with vegetation and have a few small ponds. Middle tidal amplitude is approx. 1,5 m (Longyearbyen harbour). The climate is characterised by low temperatures and low precipitation. Average temperature is 5,9 ^{O}C in July. Annual average temperature is -6,7^{O}. Annual precipitation is 190 mm. (Svalbard Airport Longyearbyen– www.met.no). The archipelago is normally icebound from mid-winter until May-June.

Natural erosion processes occur on sandy shores and hard rock shoreline due to a very harsh climate with waves and sea ice. All fresh water on the islands originates from precipitation.

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17. Physical features of the catchment area:
Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, and climate (including climate type).

Shallow marine waters mostly less than six metres deep at low tide, includes sea bays and straits. There is also some deeper areas.

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18. Hydrological values:
Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.
The site has som value as shoreline stabilization.

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19. Wetland Types

a) presence:
Circle or underline the applicable codes for the wetland types of the Ramsar "Classification System for Wetland Type" present in the Ramsar site. Descriptions of each wetland type code are provided in Annex I of the *Explanatory Notes & Guidelines*.

Marine/coastal: A • B • C • D • E • F • G • H • I • J • K • Zk(a)

Inland: L • M • N • O • P • Q • R • Sp • Ss • Tp Ts • U • Va • Vt • W • Xf • Xp • Y • Zg • Zk(b)

Human-made: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • Zk(c)

b) dominance:
List the wetland types identified in a) above in order of their dominance (by area) in the Ramsar site, starting with the wetland type with the largest area. A, D, E

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20. General ecological features:
Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

Situated in the Arctic and characterized by:

- group of islands in the fiord zone with rock or sand/gravel dominated shores.

- no or only some sparse grass vegetation and some small ponds. All vegetation on the islands is influenced by saltwater.
- the islands are normally icebound in winter and spring.

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 14, 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*.

Vegetation and vegetation types have not been surveyed and mapped, so little specific information is available. There is however registered *Puccinellia vahliana* who is listed as NT in the national red list.

22. 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:

On the national red list (Svalbard) or interesting species:
Approx. 130 pairs of Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* (NT, 385 pair in 1996), a few pairs of Brent Geese *Branta barnicla hrota* (5-10 pairs), Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* (10-30 pairs) (NT) and 1-5 pairs of Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius (NT).* Nationally common species: Common Eider *Somateria molissima* (800-900 pairs), Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* (30 pairs), Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhunchus* (20-40 pairs) and Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* (1-5 pairs) probably breed here annually, but there is a lack of yearly data. The Norwegian (Svalbard) Red List 2010 is used.

23. Social and cultural values:

a) Describe if the site has any general social and/or 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:

Harvest of eggs and eider down has been performed with various intensity in Svalbard from the 18th century and until today. Trappers using this part of Isfjorden as hunting grounds have collected eggs and eider down also in this archipelago in the past.

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning?

If Yes, tick the box ❑ and describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:

ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:

iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:

iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:
a) within the Ramsar site:
State owned (100%)

b) in the surrounding area:
State owned (100%)

25. Current land (including water) use:
a) within the Ramsar site:
Trappers living in the Isfjorden area have occasionally been given permission to collect eider down after nesting birds have left the islands.

b) in the surroundings/catchment:
Ships and smaller boats passing, also in the narrow strait between the islands and the mainland.

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:
a) within the Ramsar site:
Harvest of eggs and eider down are performed with various intensity. The harvest is strictly regulated and is not considered to have negative impact to the population of eider.
b) in the surrounding area:
Increasing tourism and oil spill from ships is a possible threat.

27. Conservation measures taken:
a) List national and/or international category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site:
In particular, if the site is partly or wholly a World Heritage Site and/or a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, please give the names of the site under these designations.

The Ramsar site was established as a nature reserve July 1th 1973.

The nature reserve lies within Sassen-Bünsow National Park (established in 2003).

b) If appropriate, list the IUCN (1994) protected areas category/ies which apply to the site (tick the box or boxes as appropriate):

Ia☑ ;Ib ❑; II ❑; III ❑; IV ❑; V ❑; VI ❑

c) Does an officially approved management plan exist; and is it being implemented?:
No management plan exists

d) Describe any other current management practices:
None

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:
e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.
There is an ambition to present a management plan in near future.

29. Current scientific research and facilities:
e.g., details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Some research and biodiversity monitoring have been conducted in the area. No field research stations in this part of Svalbard.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

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

No such activities have been conducted, mainly because of the remoteness of the area and difficult access.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

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

There is no use of the Ramsar site for recreation/tourism. The regulations for the nature reserve ban visits from May 15th to August 15th because of the birds breeding season.

32. Jurisdiction:

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

Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management (DN), Tungasletta 2, 7485 Trondheim
Ph +47 73580500
Fax +47 73580501
Email: postmottak@dirnat.no

33. 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.

The site is managed by the Governor of Svalbard, which is under the instruction of DN on matters concerning nature conservation issues. Address: Governor of Svalbard, PO Box. 633, N-9171 Longyearbyen. Phone: +47 79 02 43 00, email: firmapost@sysselmannen.no

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Bangjord, G., 1996, Pattedyr- og fugleregistreringer på Svalbard i 1996. Norsk polarinstitutt 1996.

Kålås, J.A., Viken, Å., Henriksen, S. and Skjelseth, S. (eds.). 2010. The 2010 Norwegian Red-list for Species. Norwegian Biodiversity Information centre, Norway.

The Governor of Svalbard – unpublished material from surveys in 1987 and 1992.

Prestrud, P. and Børset, A. 1984. Status of the goose populations in the bird sanctuaries in Svalbard. *Norsk Polarinsitutt Skr. 181: 129-133.*

Prestrud, P. and Mehlum, F. 1991: Population size and summer distribution of the Common Eider Somateria melissima in Svalbard 1981-1985. *Norsk Polarinsitutt Skrifter 195. 9-20.*