

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as  
Waterfowl Habitat

**CITATION FOR RAMSAR SITE**

**(Kampala criteria, 2005)**

**CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND PEATLANDS (UK13003)**

**Site Description:**

The Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar site is located in the north of mainland Scotland. The site comprises an extensive area of deep blanket bog and very wet mire communities interspersed with wet heath, bog pools and lochs. Blanket bog is rare in world terms and Britain has a significant proportion of the total world resource. The Caithness and Sutherland peatlands form the largest and most intact area of this habitat in Scotland and represent the extreme northern Atlantic part of the range of variation. Associated with these peatlands, and the surrounding moorland and open water, is a diverse assemblage of breeding birds that is of international importance.

**Interest Features (marked in bold):** N.B All bird figures relate to numbers at the time of designation except where amended by the 2001 SPA Review and/or subsequent surveys (red-throated diver, common scoter and greenshank):

Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 1 by virtue of it containing a variety of wetland types:

- **Blanket bog**, encompassing an exceptionally wide range of vegetation and surface pattern types (pool systems), some of which are unknown elsewhere. The suite of bog types ranges from those of the Caithness plain in the east, with their continental affinities, through to those of the much more oceanic west and includes both upland and lowland areas. Extensive areas of ombrotrophic (rain-fed) bog are present, where *Sphagnum* and other bog species ensure active peat accumulation.
- **Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface.** .
- **Oligotrophic lochs** in addition to **dystrophic lochs, lochans and pools**, fen communities (surrounding the lochs, lochans and pools), as well as **wet heath**, grassland and rivers occur in a mosaic with the blanket bog and very wet mires. These provide the diversity of habitats necessary to support a wide range of wetland species.

Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

- Two nationally scarce moss species, ***Sphagnum lindbergii*** (occurring only in Scotland in Great Britain) and ***S. majus***.
- A nationally scarce higher plant the **bog orchid** *Hammarbya paludosa*.

- The invertebrate fauna includes the nationally rare water beetle ***Oreodytes alpinus***, the entire British population of which is found in only a small number of lochs in the Caithness and Sutherland area.
- Mammals of importance include the **otter** *Lutra lutra*, which are wide ranging throughout the site.
- **Freshwater pearl mussel** *Margaritifera margaritifera* occur in watercourses and waterbodies within the site including the River Naver SAC and the River Borgie SAC, which are an integral part of the Ramsar site's blanket bog, very wet mires and moorland system.

*Sphagnum lindbergii*, *S. majus* and bog orchid are all associated with the blanket bog and very wet mire habitats and those habitats occurring in close association with them, and are protected and managed as part of them.

Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar site further qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

- **Red-throated diver** *Gavia stellata* (2006, 46 pairs, 3.5% of the GB population).
- **Black-throated diver** *Gavia arctica* (1994, 26 pairs, 15% of the GB population).
- **Golden plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* (1993 and 1994, 1,064 pairs, 5% of the GB population).
- **Wood sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* (up to 5 pairs, up to 40% of the GB population), and
- **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina schinzii* (1993 and 1994, 1,860 pairs, 20% of the GB population).

Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 4 by supporting the following waterbird species at a critical stage in their life cycles:

- **Wigeon** *Anas penelope* (1993/94, at least 43 pairs, at least 10.8% of the GB population).
- **Common scoter** *Melanitta nigra* (2007, at least 21 pairs, at least 40.4% of the GB population), and
- **Greenshank** *T. nebularia* (2009, at least 653 pairs, at least 59.4% of the GB population).

Area: 145,960.53 ha  
 National Grid Ref: ND037340  
 OS Sheet 1:50,000 – 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17

Designated on the 2 February 1999, with extension designated 22 August 2023.  
 This (amended) citation adopted on 21 November 2025.

## Associated designations

The boundary of the Ramsar site lies within the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA). The Ramsar site is coincident with the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The River Naver SAC and River Borgie SAC, both partly overlap the Ramsar site.

The boundary of the Ramsar site generally follows those of 39 constituent Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Caithness and Sutherland:

- A'Mhoine
- Ben Griams (summits of Ben Griam Beag and Ben Griam Mor excluded)
- Blar nam Faoileag
- Coire na Beinne Mires
- Dunbeath Peatlands
- Grudie Peatlands
- Loch Meadie Peatlands
- Mallart
- Rumsdale Peatlands
- Skinsdale Peatlands
- Strath Duchally
- Stroupster Peatlands
- West Borgie
- Bad na Gallaig
- Ben Hutig (seacliffs excluded)
- Cnoc an Alaskie
- Druim na Coibe
- East Halladale
- Knockfin Heights
- Lochan Buidhe Mires
- Moss of Killimster
- Shielton Peatlands
- Sletill Peatlands
- Strathmore Peatlands
- Syre Peatlands
- West Halladale
- Badanloch Bogs
- Ben Loyal (montane area excluded)
- Coir' an Eoin
- Druim nam Bad
- Forsinard Bogs
- Loch Caluim Flows
- Lon a' Chuil
- Oliclett
- Skelpick Peatlands
- Strath an Loin
- Strathy Bogs
- Truderscaig
- West Strathnaver