

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as  
Waterfowl Habitat

**CITATION FOR RAMSAR SITE**

**(Kampala criteria, 2005)**

**MORAY AND NAIRN COAST (UK13048)**

**Site Description**

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site comprises Culbin Sands, Culbin Bar, Findhorn Bay, Spey Bay and the lower River Spey in the south and east of the Moray Firth in northern Scotland.

**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 (osprey, dunlin, oystercatcher, wigeon), and/or by subsequent surveys (foraging osprey).

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 1 by virtue of it containing a variety of wetland types:

- **Sand dunes**, at Culbin.
- Recently deposited and more stable vegetated **shingle** (with a diverse flora including dune grassland and herb-rich heath), forms extensive bars at Culbin with additional beaches and a smaller bar at Spey Bay. Culbin Bar lies offshore and is 7km long.
- Large intertidal mudflats (with sizable eelgrass beds) and sandflats support **saltmarsh**, at Culbin, Findhorn Bay and Spey Bay. All are relatively unaffected by reclamation or industrial development.
- On the more stable river shingles at Spey Bay and the Lower River Spey, **estuarine alder woodland** (dominated by alder with areas of willow and mixed stands of alder/ash), considered to be among the best natural examples of this habitat in Britain.

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

Vascular plants:

- The nationally scarce **sea centaury** *Centaurium littorale* particularly associated with the saltmarsh habitat.
- The vulnerable **dwarf eelgrass** *Zostera noltei* on the saltmarsh of the intertidal mudflats.
- On the shingle two nationally scarce plants **oysterplant** *Mertensia maritima* and in damp slacks within the shingle **Baltic rush** *Juncus balticus*.

Invertebrates:

- ***Ochthebius lenensis***, a water beetle, found near freshwater and brackish waterbodies within the intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh and estuarine alder woodland, and
- ***Tetanocera freyi***, a snail killing fly, on the saltmarshes.

The plant species are all associated with the specified Ramsar habitats and are protected and managed as part of them.

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

- **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*, which forage throughout the Ramsar site (2008 to 2012, five year mean of up to 9 territories within feeding range, 4.5% of the GB population and 7 pairs breeding within the site, 7% of the GB population)
- **Bar-tailed godwit** *Limosa lapponica* (1989/90 to 1993/94, five year winter peak mean of 899 individuals, 2% of the GB population).

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site further qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 5 by regularly supporting waterbirds in numbers of 20,000 individuals or more. In the five-year period 1989/90 to 1993/94 a winter peak mean of 24,000 individual waterbirds was recorded comprising 14,500 wildfowl and 9,500 waders. The site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 4 by supporting the following waterbird species at a critical stage in their life cycles:

- **Red-breasted merganser** *Mergus serrator* (102 individuals, 1% of the GB population).

A winter peak mean of 20,250 individual waterbirds was recorded, including nationally important populations in the five year period 1991/92 to 1995/96, greater than 2,000 individuals of the following species:

- **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina alpina* (2,689 individuals, 0.5% of the GB population).
- **Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* (2,171 individuals, 0.6% of the GB population).
- **Wigeon** *Anas penelope* (2,600 individuals, 0.9% of the GB population).

Bar-tailed godwit, pink-footed goose, greylag goose and redshank are also components of the waterbird assemblage.

The Moray and Nairn Coast Ramsar site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 6 by regularly supporting 1% or more of the individuals in a population of waterbirds:

- **Pink-footed goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus* (1988/89 to 1992/93, winter peak mean of 7,538 individuals, 4% of the Eastern Greenland/Iceland/UK biogeographic population).
- **Greylag goose** *Anser anser* (1988/89 to 1992/93, winter peak mean of 3,023 individuals, 3% of the Iceland/UK/Ireland biogeographic population).

- **Redshank** *Tringa totanus* (1989/90 to 1993/94, winter peak mean of 1,690 individuals, 1% of the Eastern Atlantic biogeographic population).

Area: 2325.67 ha

National Grid Ref: NH999647

OS Sheet 1:50,000: 27, 28

Designated on 2 February 1997.

This (amended) citation adopted on 15 September 2025.

Measured site area corrected from 2410 ha

### **Associated Designations**

The boundary of the Ramsar site is coincident with the Moray and Nairn Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). Culbin Bar Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Lower River Spey-Spey Bay SAC are contained within it.

The site follows the coastline within the Culbin Sands, Culbin Forest and Findhorn Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the estuarine limit of the Spey Bay SSSI and the boundary of the Lower River Spey SSSI.