

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as  
Waterfowl Habitat

**CITATION FOR RAMSAR SITE**

**(Kampala criteria, 2005)**

**SOUTH UIST MACHAIR AND LOCHS (UK13058)**

**Site Description**

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site is a complex site along the west coast of South Uist. The habitats include outstanding examples of relict woodland scrub, moorland and blanket bog, large oligotrophic lochs, acidic blacklands, wet and dry machair with sand dune slacks as well as machair lochs, freshwater marsh/fen, brackish water lochs, saltmarsh, coastal sand dunes and sandy and rocky shores. These areas are of outstanding importance for their populations of wintering and breeding waterbirds.

**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 (oystercatcher, redshank and sanderling):

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 1 by virtue of it containing a variety of wetland types:

- Loch Druidibeg and Loch Fada are **oligotrophic lochs** with surrounding fen communities.
- Loch Bee, Loch Roag and Loch Grunavat are **brackish water lochs**, on the western shore of Loch Bee there is an extensive saltmarsh.

Loch Druidibeg is the largest oligotrophic loch in South Uist. The shallow waters support a relatively poor fauna and flora whose distribution within the loch reflects variations in calcareous influences. There are many islands in the loch which provide important nesting sites for terns and support relict woodland scrub (dominated by willows).

Loch Bee is the largest brackish water loch in the Western Isles and is connected with the sea at its north-west and south-east extremities, exhibiting a gradation in salinity from freshwater to seawater, with salinity varying throughout the loch.

The short estuary of the Howmore River and its catchment comprises brackish water lochs, Loch Roag and Loch Grunavat, and an oligotrophic loch, Loch Fada, in association with machair. Both the estuary of the Howmore River and Loch Roag are under tidal influence and they contain a mixture of freshwater and saltwater plants. Loch Fada flows into Loch Roag through sluice gates which prevent brackish water entering this freshwater loch. The Howmore River and Loch Roag together with Loch Fada, form one of the best examples in Britain of a gradation from estuarine to

freshwater habitats associated with a machair system, creating and supporting an accompanying gradation in the flora and fauna.

- **Machair lochs** (with surrounding fen communities) occur throughout the machair plain. Loch Stilligarry, Loch Grogarry and the Loch Hallan system are outstanding examples of this habitat.
- **Sand dune slacks** and **machair** are found on the machair plain (dry machair, wet machair, sand dune slacks and machair lochs), the largest machair system in Britain.
- Wet machair grades into marshes and fens around the margins of the lochs, particularly at Loch Hallan. Loch Hallan is shallow with slow water movement which has allowed the formation of rich marsh and **fen communities**, including the most extensive reed beds in the Uists. Loch na Liana Moire to the north of Loch Hallan, also contains the fen feature.
- The eastern fringes of Loch Druidibeg are outwith the influences of wind-blown shell sand and are covered by **blanket bog** and acidic moorland.

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site contains a range of habitat transitions from blanket bog to calcareous coastal plain, and from freshwater to brackish/saltwater. This transition is of outstanding importance providing the diversity of habitats necessary to support a wide range of wetland species.

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

Three nationally scarce vascular plants,

- **Baltic rush** *Juncus balticus* in the uncultivated machair plain at Loch Bee.
- **Cowbane** *Cicuta virosa* (at its northern limit in the British Isles) in the reed beds of the marsh and fen communities particularly at Loch Hallan and Loch na Liana Moire.
- **Slender-leaved pondweed** *Potamogeton filiformis* in Loch Druidibeg, Loch Stilligarry, Loch Grogarry, Loch Toronais, Mid Loch Ollay, Loch a'Phuirt-ruaidh, Loch Fada, Loch an Eilein, Loch Hallan and Loch na Liana Moire.
- The nationally rare Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 8 plant, **slender naiad** *Najas flexilis* in Loch Druidibeg, Loch a'Phuirt-ruaidh, Loch Fada, Mid Loch Ollay, Loch an Eilein, Loch Hallan and Loch na Liana Moire.

The mammal fauna includes,

- **Otter** *Lutra lutra*, which are wide ranging throughout the site.

The plant species are all associated with particular Ramsar habitats (as specified), and are protected and managed as part of them.

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 2 by supporting:

- **Little tern** *Sternula albifrons* (1986 to 1990, 31 pairs, 1% of the GB population), and
- **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina schinzii* (1995, 357 pairs, 4% of the GB population).

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site further qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 4 by supporting the following waterbird species at a critical stage in their life cycles:

- **Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* (2007, 629 pairs, 0.6% of the GB population), and
- **Sanderling** *Calidris alba* (2004, 667 wintering individuals, 4% of the GB population).

South Uist Machair and Lochs Ramsar site also qualifies under Ramsar Criterion 6 by regularly supporting 1% or more of the individuals in a population of waterbirds:

- **Ringed plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* (1995, 393 pairs, 3% of the Europe/Northern Africa biogeographic population; and, during 1993/94 and 1994/95, up to 490 wintering individuals, 1% of the same biogeographic population).
- **Redshank** *Tringa totanus* (2007, 379 pairs, 1.3% of the Eastern Atlantic biogeographic population)

Area: 5027.31 ha  
National Grid Ref: NF764380  
OS Sheet 1:50,000 – 22, 31

Designated on 1 December 1997.

This (amended) citation adopted on 15 September 2025.

Measured site area corrected from 3352 ha

### **Associated designations**

The boundary of the Ramsar site is coincident with the South Uist Machair and Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) and contains the smaller South Uist Machair Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Ramsar site also follows the boundary of the following Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): Loch Bee SSSI; Loch Bee Machair SSSI; Loch Druidibeg SSSI; Howmore Estuary, Lochs Roag and Fada SSSI; Bornish and Ormiclate Machairs SSSI and Loch Hallan SSSI.