

CITATION

MORRICH MORE SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Highland (Easter Ross and Cromarty)

Site code: 1188

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NH 830840

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 21
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 438

AREA: 2930.72 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Geomorphology: Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland

Biological: Coastlands: Saltmarsh
Coastlands: Sand dune
Vascular plants: Vascular plant assemblage
Invertebrates: Invertebrate assemblage
Birds: Breeding bird assemblage
Birds: Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), non breeding
Birds: Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), non breeding
Birds: Teal (*Anas crecca*), non breeding
Birds: Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), non breeding

DESCRIPTION

Morrich More Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the outstanding coastal sites in Britain and is located at the mouth of the Dornoch Firth to the east of Tain. The site has developed on an extensive low-level sandy plain and supports a diverse range of biological and geomorphological features.

The variety and scale of the coastal landforms at Morrigh More SSSI is outstanding. These landforms include mobile parabolic and foredunes, stabilised grey dunes, salt marshes and sandflats. The site contains a complete morphological and stratigraphic record of shoreline changes over the last 7000 years. Furthermore, the site is highly dynamic such that the landforms are constantly moving and evolving. The site therefore has a potential, perhaps greater than any other part of the Highland coastline, for research into rates of contemporary change and comparison with those deduced from sub-surface stratigraphy.

A very extensive saltmarsh largely surrounds the site and grades into dune and other coastal habitats thus enabling an extensive range of habitat mosaics to develop, especially on the north side of Inver Bay. The saltmarsh is grazed with a diverse range of creeks and brackish pools. Most of the site however is dominated by a diverse range of different sand dunes which support heath and grassland habitats according to the watertable and nutrient conditions. The youngest and most dynamic parts of the site have mobile dunes with Lyme grass *Leymus arenarius* and

Marram grass *Ammophila arenaria* as well as strandline species such as Sea-holly *Eryngium maritimum*. More stable (and older) dunes have extensive heath or grassland communities. The heath supports heather, cross leaved heath and crowberry. Juniper is abundant and is more extensive than at any other British dune system. There is a wide range of mosaics between all these habitats.

The diversity of habitat results in a wide range of vascular plants with species such as seaside centaury *Centaureum littorale* which is growing close to its the northernmost limit in Britain. In contrast Eyebright *Euphrasia foulaensis* is growing close to its southern limit in Britain on the east Coast. Other nationally scarce species include variegated horsetail *Equisetum variegatum*, slender-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton filiformis*, Baltic rush *Juncus balticus*, narrow-leaved eelgrass *Zostera marina* var. *angustifolia* and dwarf eelgrass *Zostera noltii*. The populations of eelgrass, Baltic rush and seaside centaury are especially large and extensive.

The range of habitats within the site is also reflected in a rich invertebrate community. Populations of the Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* and Galium carpet moth *Epirrhoe galiata* are present on this site and are close to their northern limit. The wide range of other nationally rare and scarce invertebrate species includes the fungus gnat *Mycomya lambi*, a species of crane fly *Tipula nodicornis*, several water beetles and the water flea *Eurycyrus glacialis* in its only Scottish location.

The assemblage of breeding birds at Morrich More again reflects the range of habitats on the site. Notable species include shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, curlew *Numenius arquata*, redshank *Tringa totanus* and linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

The site is of major importance for passage and wintering wildfowl and waders. These species move around the wider Dornoch Firth but Morrich More supports particularly large numbers of wigeon *Anas penelope*, bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*, curlew *Numenius arquata* and common teal *Anas crecca*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1974

Renotified under the 1981 Act: 11 March 1987 with a 211 ha increase in area

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 8 December 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of the site corrected from 2975 ha.

Morrich More SSSI is part of Dornoch Firth and Morrich More Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below:

Habitats: Atlantic salt meadows
Coastal dune heathland
Dune grassland
Dunes with juniper thickets

Estuaries
Glasswort and other annuals colonising mud and sand
Humid dune slacks
Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
Lime-deficient dune heathland with crowberry
Reefs
Shifting dunes
Shifting dunes with marram
Subtidal sandbanks

Species: Common seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Morrich More SSSI is also part of Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the following birds:

Birds: Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), non breeding
Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), non breeding *
Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*), non breeding *
Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), non breeding
Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), breeding
Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), non breeding*
Teal (*Anas crecca*), non breeding*
Waterfowl assemblage, non breeding
Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), non breeding

* indicates components of the waterfowl assemblage

Part of Morrigh More SSSI overlaps with the Moray Firth SAC which is designated for its subtidal sandbanks and population of bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*).