



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland  
 Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

**Baleshare & Kirkibost**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**Stilligarry**  
**South Uist**  
**Western Isles**  
**HS8 5RS**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

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**Site code: 121**

**Purpose**



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

<b>Natural features of Baleshare &amp; Kirkibost SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Machair	Favourable, recovered (13 August 2009)	SAC (machair)
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (16 July 2004)	
Sand dune	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (30 June 2008)	SPA (includes all SPA bird features)

<b>Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>SPA or SAC</b>
Annual vegetation of drift lines	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC
Atlantic salt meadows	Favourable, maintained (16 July 2004)	SAC
Dune grassland	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC

Humid dune slacks	Favourable, maintained (30 July 2009)	SAC
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed	Unfavourable, no change (08 September 2004)	SAC
Shifting dunes	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC
Shifting dunes with marram	Favourable, maintained (17 July 2009)	SAC
Slender naiad	Unfavourable, no change (08 September 2004)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (30 June 2008)	SPA
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (26 June 2007)	SPA
Greenland Barnacle goose, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (21 February 2009)	SPA
Oystercatcher, breeding	Favourable, maintained (18 June 2007)	SPA
Purple sandpiper, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA
Redshank, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2003)	SPA
Ringed plover, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2003)	SPA
Ringed plover, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA
Turnstone, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA

### **Description of the site**

Baleshare and Kirkibost site of special scientific interest (SSSI) is located on the south-west of North Uist, to the west of Clachan and Carinish. The site is of both national and international importance for its machair habitat, for which it is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom; and its ornithological interest.

The machair system comprises gently sloping coastal plains formed by wind blown calcareous shell sand which incorporates a mosaic of species rich grassland, fens and lochs, with dunes towards the sea and blackland (a mixture of peat and sand) further inland.

The dune and machair habitats and the breeding and wintering birds they support are also of international importance as the SSSI forms part of the North Uist Machair Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the North Uist Machair and Islands Special Protection Area (SPA), designated under the EC Habitats and Birds Directives respectively.

The site supports important breeding populations of corncrake, dunlin, oystercatcher, redshank, ringed plover and, and important wintering populations of barnacle goose, ringed plover and turnstone. In addition there are high densities of other wader and

waterfowl species.

All the designated habitats have been condition monitored on various dates as shown in the table above. The majority of the habitats have been recorded as being in favourable condition; however the naturally nutrient-rich lochs which are often dominated by pondweed and slender naiad have been recorded as Unfavourable, no change. This is due to the presence of the invasive, non-native, Nuttall's pondweed recorded from a loch at Balranald.

### **Past and present management**

Baleshare is under crofting tenure and is used for rotational strip cultivation, and grazing for sheep and cattle. Kirkibost is uninhabited and relatively inaccessible. It has not been cultivated for many years and is used for seasonal grazing of cattle. Much of Baleshare common machair has been apportioned.

Much of the land has been managed under past agri–environmental schemes such as ESA and RSS. These schemes have ended and have been replaced by SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Contracts). SNH encourages applications to relevant schemes such as SRDP – Rural Priorities that aim to deliver positive management consistent with site objectives, for example, machair cropping, management of species-rich grassland, management of corncrakes and controlling erosion by rabbits.

The Uist Greylag Goose Scheme is being managed under the Machair LIFE Project, with the aim of minimising damage to growing crops by geese using co-ordinated scaring methods. The Machair Life+ Project is available to encourage traditional crofting methods aimed at conserving the machair. The project will provide machinery, labour and advice to address local crofting issues. Traditional methods that will be encouraged through the project include later harvesting, stooking and stacking crops and the application of seaweed as a fertiliser.

Other land management includes sport shooting and the maintenance of existing drains and tracks.

Baleshare's western beach is a locally popular recreation area due to its large extent and easy access. Neither of these activities appear to have a detrimental effect on the site.

### **Objectives for Management** (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site, its natural features and to monitor the effectiveness of current management practices.

#### **1. To maintain the condition and extent of the machair habitats.**

The machair habitats and the characteristic abundance and diversity of flowering plants are being maintained by the current mix of traditional cultivation and seasonal grazing. The use of seaweed as a fertiliser and grazing by cattle are beneficial, as are, hard

grazing in the winter and a grazing break during the summer.

The dunes are being maintained by natural processes of erosion and accretion as sand moves around the site. On Baleshare, they are protected in part by the shingle bank and significant removal of shingle would be likely to exacerbate erosion. The marram grass could be damaged by overgrazing. If rabbits begin to cause erosion it would be useful to reduce numbers.

The saltmarsh is being maintained by light grazing. It could be damaged by heavier grazing, trampling, removal of turf or damage from vehicles.

## **2. To maintain the population and distribution of the important birds and avoid significant disturbance.**

The range of breeding and wintering birds using the site depends on a variety of habitats both cultivated and grazed. Some breeding waders use cultivated ground for their nests and therefore cultivation activities such as rolling after 15<sup>th</sup> May should be avoided as it can destroy a high proportion of nests.

Corncrakes need areas of long vegetation throughout the breeding season and do move from early cover in April when they first arrive to hayfields (or equivalent areas of tall vegetation) to late cover after August. If cutting or grazing is delayed after 1<sup>st</sup> August this increases breeding success significantly and enables the population to remain stable. Later harvesting beyond this date increases breeding success further.

Birds such as corn bunting eat mature seeds and are declining significantly in response to a lack of winter food. They benefit from the late harvesting of ripened crops, particularly when crops are stooked, stacked and then fed to cattle over the winter. Corn buntings are part of the assemblage of breeding birds.

Wintering birds such as barnacle geese prefer short grazed grass and the grazed machair grassland provides them with suitable habitat. Sport shooting does take place on the site but does not appear to be causing significant disturbance. Wintering waders feed around the shores and benefit from a plentiful supply of cast tangle and an absence of prolonged or persistent disturbance.

## **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

### Introduced mammals

The presence of non-native mammals such as feral ferrets, cats and, especially, hedgehogs can adversely affect populations of ground nesting birds.

### Climate change:

Global climate change is predicted to lead to increased storminess and sea-level rise which could cause increased coastal erosion and threaten low-lying dune and machair systems. Habitats may be modified in response to climate change.

Date last reviewed: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011