

**CITATION****BALESHARE AND KIRKIBOST  
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**  
Western Isles

Site code: 121

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NF785623

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 18  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 454

AREA: 1359.58 ha.

**NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES:**

Biological : Coastlands : Machair  
: Coastlands : Saltmarsh  
: Coastlands : Sand Dune  
: Birds : Breeding Bird Assemblage

**DESCRIPTION:**

Baleshare and Kirkibost SSSI, one of the largest sand dune systems in western Scotland is located on the islands of Baleshare and Kirkibost. The site is important in the national series of sand dune systems because of the range of coastal habitats represented. There is a range from calcareous to acidic dune slack communities, often with brackish influences apparent, with amongst the highest numbers of plant species in dune slacks and wet machair in the Western Isles. There are also high numbers of saltmarsh and brackish communities. The site supports a range of bird species and is particularly important for breeding waders.

The coastal sand dunes, with sand spits at the northern and southern extremities of Baleshare, grade into intertidal flats with adjacent saltmarshes along much of the sheltered eastern shores; and into hummocky machair or flat, dry and wet, machair in western inland areas. The variety of habitats has contributed to the rich diversity of plant communities found within the site. The machair grassland, in particular, but also the cultivated patches and fallows, are covered in a profusion of characteristic flowering plants. This in turn supports important invertebrate populations, including great yellow bumble bee *Bombus distinguendus*. The dune slack communities have considerable populations of parsley water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii* and localised species such as Baltic rush *Juncus balticus* and sea rush *J. maritimus*. They also have high numbers of moss species, including the nationally rare brittle crisp moss *Tortella fragilis*. Many of the saltmarshes and brackish communities contain localised species, such as saltmarsh flat sedge *Blysmus rufus*.

The machair and associated marshes support exceptionally high densities of breeding waders, with redshank, dunlin and ringed plover breeding in considerable numbers.

The site has a varied range of associated habitats which are not notified but add to the diversity of the site. Some of the freshwater lochs in the machair and blackland have associated fens and marshes which are rich in higher plants and mosses.

## NOTIFIATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 26 February 1985

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011

## REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 1465.7 ha).

Baleshare and Kirkibost SSSI is designated as part of North Uist Machair special area of conservation (SAC) for the European habitats and species listed below and as part of North Uist Machair and Islands special protection area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

Habitats: Annual vegetation of drift lines  
Atlantic salt meadows  
Dune grassland  
Humid dune slacks  
Machair  
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed  
Shifting dunes  
Shifting dunes with marram

Species: Slender naiad *Najas flexilis*

Birds: Corncrake *Crex crex*, breeding  
Dunlin *Calidris alpina schinzii*, breeding  
Greenland barnacle goose *Branta leucopsis*, non-breeding  
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, breeding  
Purple sandpiper *Calidris maritima*, non-breeding  
Redshank *Tringa totanus*, breeding  
Ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, breeding & non-breeding  
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, non-breeding