

## CITATION

### PABBAY, WESTERN ISLES SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST WESTERN ISLES

Site code: 1265

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NF 890879

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 18  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 455

AREA: 552.77 Ha

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological	: Geomorphology	: Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland
Biological	: Coastlands	: Machair
	: Fens	: Springs (including flushes)
	: Non-vascular plants	: Bryophyte assemblage
	: Birds	: Greenland barnacle goose, non-breeding
	: Birds	: Breeding bird assemblage

## DESCRIPTION:

Pabbay lies 3km northwest of Berneray in the Sound of Harris. The site comprises of a complex dune and machair system that holds uncommon spring and flush plant communities that support many rare and notable bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). The range of habitats also supports nationally important numbers of wintering Barnacle geese and a notable variety of breeding birds.

Pabbay, with its beach, dunes and machair systems has been identified to be of national importance for geomorphology. The island contains representative examples of many major dune and machair landforms found in the Outer Hebrides including unusual large-scale (5-10m high) conical sand dunes. Unusually, the machair faces south-east into the Sound of Harris. This is in contrast to most machair beaches which face the Atlantic to the west. The site also contains buried intertidal organic deposits indicating that the coastline has been progressively submerged. The site therefore provides a key location in which to study coastline development in the Outer Hebrides.

Pabbay has the largest expanse of hill machair (or 'climbing' dune) vegetation in the Outer Hebrides. The hill machair has developed through shell sand being blown up the slope of a hill and is characterised by the presence of red fescue *Festuca rubra*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha* and wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*. This vegetation extends to nearly 200m above sea level, almost 100m higher than any comparable site in the Outer Hebrides.

Other unique features of the machair vegetation on Pabbay are the occurrence of a water purslane *Lythrum portula* soakway and extensive patches of a black bog rush

*Schoenus nigricans* flush which are distinct from any recorded elsewhere in the Outer Hebrides. The rich bryophyte flora includes several species not found on machair elsewhere in the Outer Hebrides including several nationally rare and scarce species.

Pabbay is one of the feeding and roosting areas on an internationally important population of Greenland barnacle geese which overwinter on the islands in the Sound of Harris and around the north and west coast of North Uist.

A variety of waders nest on the island: dunlin, ringed plover, lapwing, oystercatcher, redshank and snipe, principally on the machair and golden plover on the heathland. There are also breeding Arctic tern and common terns.

## **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the 1981 Act: 06 January 1997

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 31 March 2011

## **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected (from 552.69 ha)

Pabbay SSSI is designated as part of North Uist Machair & Islands Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

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