

CITATION**BALTA
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Shetland**

Site code: 144

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: HP660077

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 1
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 470

AREA: 16.23 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES**Geomorphology: Coastal geomorphology of Scotland****DESCRIPTION:**

Balta SSSI occupies a low, north-west facing basin on Balta, the small island at the mouth of Balta Sound to the east of the island of Unst.

The SSSI is the most complete machair system in Shetland. It consists of an area of blown sand extending across the island from a small bay on the western side of the island, through a low col to the eastern sea cliffs. Dunes are absent and the complex thus represents an example of a beach-machair continuum. Aeolianite (blown sand cemented by calcite deposited from sub-surface water) is present and provides a base-level for wind erosion in places. A combination of rill dissection by running water, severe wind deflation and a high rabbit population has reduced the machair to a highly dissected state in the past, making it an ideal research area for studying the processes of machair erosion.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 25 January 1988

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25 February 2011

Measured area of site amended from 16.1 ha.