



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

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

<p><b>VALLAY</b>  <b>Site of Special Scientific Interest</b></p> <p><b>SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT</b></p> <p>Site code: 1587</p>	<p><b>Stilligarry</b>  <b>South Uist</b>  <b>Western Isles</b>  <b>HS8 5RS</b></p> <p>Tel. 01870 620238          E: <a href="mailto:western_isles@snh.gov.uk">western_isles@snh.gov.uk</a></p>
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**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 Vallay SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Machair	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC (machair)
Sand dune	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (June 2002)	SPA (includes all SPA bird features)
Greenland barnacle goose	Favourable, maintained (March 2003)	SPA

<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 (July 2009)	SAC
Atlantic salt meadows	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	SAC

Dune grassland	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Humid dune slacks	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Shifting dunes	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Shifting dunes with marram	Favourable, maintained (July 2009)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2008)	SPA
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2007)	SPA
Oystercatcher, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2007)	SPA
Purple sandpiper, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2004)	SPA
Redshank, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2007)	SPA
Ringed plover, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2003)	SPA
Ringed plover, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2004)	SPA
Turnstone, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (Oct 2009)	SPA

### **Description of the site**

The tidal island of Vallay is situated just off the north coast of North Uist. It is composed almost entirely of machair and sand dune systems, with some rocky bedrock coasts. The transition of habitats through from saltmarsh to freshwater marsh to machair is one of the finest examples in Britain. These transitional habitats are of great interest due to the number of plant species they support.

In addition to its machair, Vallay has some important bird species, with 6 species of breeding wader including dunlin and ringed plover; corncrake and small numbers of terns including little tern. In the winter the island usually has a flock of several hundred Greenland barnacle geese. The beaches around Vallay are also of interest for their wintering waders.

All the designated habitats have been condition monitored as favourable maintained on various dates as shown in the table above.

### **Past and present management**

The site has one main owner. They let the shooting tenancy to the adjacent estate and sport shooting is carried out within the site. They also have an agricultural tenant who manages the area organically for rotational strip cultivation, and grazing for cattle.

Prior to this tenancy, the island had not been cultivated for some time and was grazed year round. Following the tenancy, the island was entered into an SNH agreement, with the involvement of the RSPB. When this scheme came to an end in 2010, most of Vallay was entered into the SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Contracts). The RSPB

helps manage the site as an unofficial reserve, monitoring breeding and wintering bird species and managing 22ha out with the RDP contract for corncrake.

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

We wish to work with the owner 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 and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

**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 marsh and gradation to machair habitats are being maintained by light grazing. It could be damaged by drainage and heavier grazing.

The dunes are being maintained by natural processes of erosion and accretion as sand moves around the site. The marram grass could be damaged by overgrazing. If rabbits begin to cause erosion it would be useful to reduce numbers.

**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 cats, hedgehogs, feral ferrets and mink can adversely affect populations of ground nesting birds. The Uist Wader and Hebridean Mink Projects aim to protect these birds by removing hedgehogs and mink respectively. No hedgehogs have been found on Vallay during past trapping efforts and it is assumed hedgehogs have not reached the island. After the perceived eradication of mink in the Uists, recent sightings in North Uist have initiated a further trapping effort which includes Vallay.

#### 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: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011