

CITATION**VALLAY
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Western Isles**

Site code: 1587

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NF775765

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

AREA: 306.11 ha.

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES:

Biological : Coastlands : Machair
: Coastlands : Saltmarsh
: Coastlands : Sand dunes
: Birds : Breeding bird assemblage
: Birds : Greenland barnacle goose

DESCRIPTION:

Vallay Island is just off the North Coast of North Uist separated by an extensive intertidal shell sand beach. The island has a wide variety of machair and sand dune types and is of particular importance in the Western Isles for its species rich salt marsh and transition to freshwater marsh communities. The range of habitats also supports a notable variety of breeding birds and wintering Barnacle geese.

The gradation of habitats from saltmarsh to freshwater marsh to machair is one of the finest examples in Britain. Around the sheltered sandy southern bay there is species-rich vegetation, grading inland from salt marsh to brackish water and freshwater marshes and fens. These wetlands are relatively lightly grazed, mainly by cattle, and support unusual marsh plants such as long-bracted sedge *Carex extensa* and distant sedge *C. distans*. Lesser marshwort *Apium inundatum* and fool's water-cress *A. nodiflorum* grow along with whorl grass *Catabrosa aquatica*.

In parts of the upper marshes and wet machair the ridges and furrows of former cultivation are apparent; they support interesting vegetation, with a variety of orchids including the fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*.

Dry machair covers the plain which extends from the marshes to the western coast and over uneven sand hills in the north and east of the island. Most of the dry machair has been cultivated in the past and this is reflected in its present flora and fauna.

The northern and eastern coasts of Vallay are composed of outcrops of Lewisian Gneiss rock interspersed with sand and shingle beaches, above which a sand dune system has developed. Amongst the sand dunes, which vary in height and size, there are blowouts and dune slacks.

Several species of birds of national importance feed nest and overwinter on Vallay.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

Notified under the 1981 Act: 26 September 1990

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 25th March 2011

REMARKS

Vallay 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