



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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BERNERAY **Site of Special Scientific Interest**

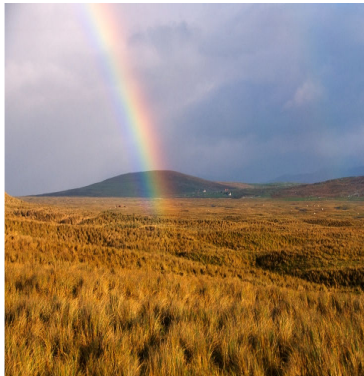
SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1715

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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.

Natural features of Berneray SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Machair	Favourable, maintained (10 August 2009)	SAC (Machair)
Greenland Barnacle Goose (wintering)	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2003)	SPA

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Annual vegetation of drift lines	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC
Atlantic salt meadows	Favourable, maintained (16 July 2004)	SAC
Dune grassland	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC
Humid dune slacks	Favourable, maintained (30 July 2009)	SAC
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated	Unfavourable, no change (08 September 2004)	SAC

by pondweed		
Shifting dunes	Favourable, maintained (10 July 2009)	SAC
Shifting dunes with marram	Favourable, maintained (17 July 2009)	SAC
Slender naiad	Unfavourable, no change (08 September 2004)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (30 June 2008)	SPA
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (26 June 2007)	SPA
Greenland Barnacle goose, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (21 February 2009)	SPA
Oystercatcher, breeding	Favourable, maintained (18 June 2007)	SPA
Purple sandpiper, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA
Redshank, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2003)	SPA
Ringed plover, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2003)	SPA
Ringed plover, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA
Turnstone, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA

Description of the site

Berneray Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the western side of the island of Berneray in the Sound of Harris. The site comprises the western machair plain of Berneray, including the sand dune systems and intertidal areas and the machair lochs of Loch Bhruist and Little Loch Borve.

The machair on Berneray is ungrazed by rabbits, and has a diverse range of plant communities. Accordingly, the site is rich in flowering plants and supports the richest moss and liverwort flora of any Outer Hebrides machair site. The dune slack communities are particularly important. The machair grasslands also support important numbers of wintering Greenland barnacle geese.

The dune and machair habitats and the breeding and wintering birds they support are of international importance as the SSSI forms part of the North Uist Machair Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the North Uist Machair and Islands Special Protection Area (SPA), designated under the EC Habitats and Birds Directives respectively.

The SSSI is part of the SAC and SPA along with various other parts along the North Uist coast. The site supports important breeding populations of corncrake, dunlin, oystercatcher, redshank, ringed plover and, and important wintering populations of barnacle goose, ringed plover and turnstone. In addition there are high densities of other wader and waterfowl species.

All the designated habitats have been condition monitored on various dates as shown

in the table above.

Past and present management

The SSSI is managed primarily for crofting under various tenancies in the two townships of Borge and Rushgarry. The crofting land-use consists of rotational strip cultivation, and grazing for sheep and cattle. The machair is fertilised by dung and seaweed and many areas are cropped in a traditional rotational pattern of oats, barley or rye sown for one or two years in succession, usually followed by a two year fallow period. Some crofters harvest the ripe crop and stack it, though the making of silage has increased in recent years. Small patches of potatoes are also grown. The pattern of extensive cropping and grazing creates a diversity of vegetation which is beneficial to wildlife.

Much of the land has been managed under past agri–environmental schemes such as ESA and RSS. These schemes have now ended and been replaced by SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Contracts). SNH encourages applications to relevant schemes such as SRDP – Rural Priorities that aim to deliver positive management consistent with site objectives, for example, machair cropping, management of species-rich grassland, management of corncrakes.

The Uist Greylag Goose Scheme is currently managed by the Machair Life+ Project and aims to minimise damage to growing crops by geese using co-ordinated scaring methods. The Machair Life+ Project is available to encourage traditional crofting methods aimed at conserving the machair. The project will provide machinery, labour and advice to address local crofting issues. Traditional methods that will be encouraged through the project include later harvesting, stooking and stacking crops and the application of seaweed as a fertiliser.

Other land management activities, including sport shooting, are carried out across the site and the beach is a locally popular recreation area due to its large extent and easy access. None of these activities appear to be having a detrimental effect on the site.

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

We wish to work with the owners, crofters and tenants 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 to monitor the effectiveness of any management arrangements.

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 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.

The machair is unique in the Uists due to the absence of rabbits, with notable differences in species composition. As such, it is important to prevent any rabbits from colonising.

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 15th 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 1st 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.

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: 31st March 2011