



Scottish Natural Heritage

LOCH BEE MACHAIR
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 966

SNH, Uist and Barra office
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South Uist
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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 Loch Bee Machair SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable, maintained (6 August 2002)	
Machair	Unfavourable, declining (15 July 2004)	SAC (Machair)
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (12 May 2009)	SPA (includes all SPA bird features)
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (25 May 2007)	SPA

Natural 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 (15 July 2004)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (6 August 2004)	SAC

Dune grassland	Favourable, maintained (15 July 2004)	SAC
Humid dune slacks	Favourable, maintained (15 July 2004)	SAC
Lagoons	Favourable, maintained (8 September 2003)	SAC
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed	Favourable, maintained (21 September 2004)	SAC
Shifting dunes with marram	Favourable, maintained (15 July 2004)	SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (22 April 2009)	SAC
Slender naiad	Favourable, maintained (23 September 2004)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (4 July 2003)	SPA
Little tern, breeding	Unfavourable, declining (15 June 2002)	SPA
Oystercatcher, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2000)	SPA
Redshank, breeding	Unfavourable, declining (16 June 2000)	SPA
Ringed plover, breeding	Favourable, declining (25 May 2007)	SPA
Ringed plover, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (27 January 2007)	SPA
Sanderling, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (31 March 2004)	SPA

Description of the site

Loch Bee Machair, located on the north-west of South Uist to the west of lochdar and West Gerinish encompasses coastal machair plain, low coastal dune ridge, dune slacks, wet machair and marshes which together form one of the most important machair areas in Scotland.

The beach complex at the site lies within the Ardivachar to Stoneybridge coastal landform assemblage. Most types of beach, dune and machair are represented at the site. At Drimore and lochdar, there are excellent examples of linear blow outs at every stage of development. The inland extent of marram grass indicates that the dunes have been reworked and redeposited.

Traditional cultivation and grazing patterns have allowed a rich diversity of plants to flourish in dry and wet machair areas as well as in associated marshes. Marshes are dominated by glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and common sedge *Carex nigra*.

The machair and associated marshes at the site support exceptionally high densities of breeding waders, particularly the internationally important population of breeding dunlin. Other breeding wader species which are abundant across the site in summer include oystercatcher, ringed plover, lapwing, snipe and redshank. Large numbers of

wintering waders including purple sandpiper, bar-tailed godwit, sanderling, ringed plover, curlew, redshank, dunlin, turnstone and oystercatcher also visit the site.

The machair was assessed as unfavourable declining in 2004 because of a reduction in the number of characteristic plant species recorded within some of the cropped machair.

Past and present management

Past land use was similar to current land use, though there are important differences. Within living memory, the number of cattle kept has declined while the number of sheep has increased. Most agricultural work is now done by machinery, horses are no longer kept and grain crops are now kept entirely as fodder rather than a proportion for human consumption.

The machair is grazed by sheep and cattle in winter and early spring. It 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.

SNH encourages applications to relevant schemes such as Rural Development Contracts – rural priorities that aim to deliver positive management consistent with site objectives, for example, machair cropping, management of species-rich grassland, management of corncrakes and controlling erosion by rabbits.

The Uist Greylag Goose Scheme aims to minimise damage to growing crops by geese using co-ordinated scaring methods. Other land management includes the maintenance of existing drains and tracks.

QinetiQ Hebrides Range have a missile launching practice range on the site. Near the shore extensive concreted areas for launch exercises are connected by a system of concrete tracks to associated facilities and administrative buildings which are situated on Loch Bee Machair SSSI and the adjacent Loch Bee SSSI.

Shooting rights are managed by the Ministry of Defence and angling is managed by Stòras Uibhist. Some informal recreation takes place within 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.

1. To maintain the condition and extent of the geomorphology of the site

Ensure any management activities do not adversely affect natural coastal processes.

2. To maintain the condition and extent of the machair habitat

Maintain stocking at a level that supports the diverse range of species typical of grazed and cropped machair such as clover, thyme and violets.

Ensure activities do not adversely affect this habitat.

Prevent establishment of thistles and ragwort over large areas.

Attempt to limit erosion caused by rabbits.

3. To maintain the population and distribution of the important birds and avoid significant disturbance

Ensure activities do not adversely affect the habitats used by breeding birds or cause significant disturbance, especially on the machair and around loch edges and islands.

Maintain stocking on the SSSI habitats at a level that supports the diverse range of bird species.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Introduced mammals

The presence of non-native mammals such as feral ferrets, cats and, especially, hedgehogs can adversely affect populations of ground nesting birds. The Uist Wader Project aims to protect these birds by removing hedgehogs, but has yet to commence works in South Uist.

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.

Front page photograph: Loch Bee Machair

Date last reviewed: 25 August 2009