



**Scottish Natural Heritage**

**LOCH DRUIDIBEG**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 977**

**SNH, Uist and Barra office**  
**Western Isles Area**  
**Stilligarry**  
**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.

<b>Natural features of Loch Druidibeg SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Coastal geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable maintained, (March 2009)	
Sand dune	Favourable maintained, (July 2004)	SAC (Annual vegetation of drift lines, Humid dune slacks, Shifting dunes with marram, Dune grassland)
Machair	Unfavourable declining (July 2004)	SAC (Machair)
Machair loch	Favourable maintained, (August 2004)	SAC (Calcium-rich nutrient-poor lakes, lochs and pools, Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed)
Oligotrophic loch	Favourable maintained, (August 2004)	SAC (Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels)
Blanket bog	Favourable maintained, (December 2006)	
Subalpine dry heath	Favourable maintained, (December 2006)	
Scrub	Unfavourable, recovering (April 2009)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable maintained, (June 2000)	SPA (includes all the SPA bird species, in table below)

<b>Natural features of overlapping Natura &amp; Ramsar sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>SPA or SAC or Ramsar</b>
Nutrient-poor shallow waters with aquatic vegetation on sandy plains	Favourable maintained (Aug 2004)	SAC
Lagoons	Favourable, maintained (September 2003)	SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (April 2009)	SAC
Slender naiad	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (July 2003)	SPA
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2000)	SPA
Little tern, breeding	Unfavourable, declining (June 2002)	SPA
Oystercatcher, breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2000)	SPA
Redshank, breeding	Unfavourable, declining (June 2000)	SPA
Ringed plover, breeding	Favourable, declining (May 2007)	SPA
Ringed plover, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (Jan 2007)	SPA
Sanderling, non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2004)	SPA
Greylag goose, breeding	Favourable, maintained (April 2009)	Ramsar

### **Description of the site**

Loch Druidibeg is a large, shallow nutrient-poor (oligotrophic) loch. Characteristic of such lochs is a relatively species-poor flora, although Druidibeg does contain the rare, delicate plant slender naiad. The SSSI includes the loch itself, the blanket bog around its eastern shores, within which are areas of dry heath, and the machair and dunes of the Stilligarry and Drimsdale townships to the west. It also includes areas of acid grassland and inbye land which are not notified features, although corncrakes breed in a few of these each year. The dune and machair is of outstanding geomorphological interest. Traditional management encourages a rich, colourful flora. Calcium-rich, nutrient-poor lochs such as Loch Grogarry and naturally nutrient-rich lochs such as Loch Stilligarry support a diverse range of plants. Loch Stilligarry is especially important for stoneworts and pondweeds, including the nationally scarce slender-leaved pondweed. The marshes bordering the machair lochs support a variety of wetland plants including early marsh orchid and lesser tussock-sedge. Over 900 species of invertebrate have been recorded from the site, including great yellow bumblebee.

Many of the islands in Loch Druidibeg support relict native woodland scrub dominated by willows but also including rowan, birch and juniper, and with a ground flora typical of woodland including bluebell, primrose and royal fern, one of the largest British ferns.

The assemblage of breeding birds within the SSSI is rich, with 40 species breeding including waders, wildfowl, birds of prey and terns. Greylag geese are no longer a notified feature of the SSSI, as their numbers here do not meet the qualifying criteria (<1% of the GB population). However, the geese remain a feature of the South Uist Machair & Lochs Ramsar site.

The machair was assessed as unfavourable declining in 2004 because of several areas of mainly rabbit-induced erosion and because an insufficient number of characteristic plant species were recorded within some of the cropped machair. The Loch Druidibeg scrub was monitored in 2004 & 2009 and was assessed on both occasions as being in an unfavourable condition because of the continued spread of *Rhododendron* and grazing impacts. All other SSSI features were in a favourable condition when last monitored.



### **Past and present management**

Past land use was similar to today although the number of cattle has declined while sheep have increased and many areas of formerly cultivated or hay crop inbye land are now improved pasture for grazing.

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 fallow period. Some crofters may 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 management could be supported by RDC options such as machair cropping, management of species-rich grassland, management for 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.

Angling and shooting are managed by Stòras Uibhist, with the exception of Loch Druidibeg itself, where fishing is let by SNH to the South Uist Angling Club. Peat cutting by hand for domestic use takes place in traditional peat bank areas.

There is a small plantation on the north-east shore of Loch Druidibeg dating from around the 1890s. It was originally planted with exotic species, including *Rhododendron*, although native tree species have been planted, especially during the 1970s, or have become established naturally.

Informal recreation takes place in many parts of the site. The area is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a National Nature Reserve (which has almost the same boundaries as the SSSI), though both are currently being reviewed.

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

We aim 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 will 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 agreements.

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 dune and machair habitats**

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

Ensure activities do not adversely affect these habitats or natural coastal processes.

Prevent establishment of thistles and ragwort over large areas.

Attempt to limit erosion caused by rabbits.

### **2. To maintain the condition and extent of the blanket bog and subalpine dry heath habitats**

Maintain stocking at a level at which there is no obvious damage to the vegetation from over-grazing or trampling and at which the vegetation continues to support species typical of the habitat such as heather and *Sphagnum* mosses

Prevent *Rhododendron* becoming established on these habitats

### **3. To maintain the condition and extent of the machair lochs and nutrient-poor lochs**

Ensure activities do not adversely affect the water quality and plant species in the lochs.

### **4. To maintain the condition and extent of the scrub**

Prevent *Rhododendron* becoming established on the Loch Druidibeg islands with native scrub.

Ensure that deer and sheep grazing do not adversely affect the scrub or associated plants.

Ensure other activities do not adversely affect the scrub or associated plants.

### **5. 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.