



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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

LOCH HALLAN

Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 988

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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 Hallan SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Machair	Favourable, recovered (5 August 2009)	SAC (Machair)
Machair loch	Favourable, maintained (22 September 2004)	SAC (naturally nutrient-rich lochs which are often dominated by pondweeds)
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (7 May 2009)	SPA (includes all SPA birds, below)
Wetland open water transition fen	Feature recently confirmed and notified – no monitoring to date	SAC (naturally nutrient-rich lochs which are often dominated by pondweeds)
Wetland basin fen	Feature recently confirmed and notified – no monitoring to date	SAC (naturally nutrient-rich lochs which are often dominated by pondweeds)

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 (6 August 2009)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (6 August 2004)	SAC
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed	Favourable, maintained (21 September 2004)	SAC
Dune grassland	Favourable, maintained (6 August 2009)	SAC
Humid dune slacks	Favourable, maintained (5 August 2009)	SAC
Lagoons	Favourable, maintained (8 September 2003)	SAC
Shifting dunes with marram	Favourable, maintained (7 August 2009)	SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (3 April, 2004)	SAC
Slender naiad	Favourable, maintained (23 September, 2004)	SAC
Corncrake, breeding	Favourable, maintained (4 July 2003)	SPA
Dunlin, breeding	Favourable, maintained (16 June 2000)	SPA
Little tern, breeding	Unfavourable, declining (23 June 2009)	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 Hallan, located on the west side of South Uist to the north and west of Daliburgh encompasses coastal machair plain, machair loch, reed bed, fen and marshes. These habitats are maintained by a long-established drainage system and together they form one of the finest machair wetlands in Scotland. There is a transition of habitats from the machair to the acidic blackland to the east.

Loch Hallan, the largest of the lochs within the SSSI, is a shallow nutrient-rich loch. Slow water movement in the loch has resulted in the formation of the most extensive reed beds in the Uists. Other lochs within the SSSI are also important for the presence of characteristic machair loch plants and animals. Loch na Liana Moire to the north is a shallow nutrient-poor loch with an unusually diverse plant life, notably pondweed. At least 10 species are found there including the nationally scarce Slender-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton filiformis*. This loch is also remarkable for the high diversity of water beetle species it supports.

Loch Hallan SSSI is important for breeding birds, particularly Loch na Liana Moire to the south which has reed beds, fens and marshes which support important numbers of breeding species including oystercatcher, ringed plover, lapwing, dunlin, snipe, redshank and corncrake. Wintering waders, whooper swans and Greenland white-fronted geese also visit the site.

The machair was assessed as favourable recovered in 2009 because of a recovery in the number of characteristic plant species recorded within some of the cropped machair. The change reflects that 2009 was a good flowering year, rather than any tangible change in site management.

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 the winter, usually followed by a grazing break during the summer. The cultivated machair is divided into individual shares (usually strips) and allocated to each croft. These areas are usually fertilised by dung and seaweed although the use of inorganic fertiliser is increasing. In this site, most crofters follow a traditional rotational pattern using local varieties of oats, barley or rye sown for one or two years in succession, followed by a similar fallow period. Part of the crop is kept for seed for the following year. It is left to ripen before harvesting, tied into sheaves and then gathered into stooks. Some crofters store the crop in large arable stacks. Small patches of potatoes are also grown. The pattern of extensive cropping and grazing creates a diversity of vegetation which is beneficial to wildlife.

The wetland habitats are maintained at their current extent by the existing drainage system which was constructed many years ago. Ongoing small scale maintenance is carried out.

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 is 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.

The site is adjacent to the recently restored Askernish Golf Course. Angling and shooting are managed by Stòras Uibhist.

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 machair lochs, open water transition fen and basin fen

Support the maintenance of the drainage system.

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

Ensure activities (ditch clearance or fishing) do not increase the spread of Canadian pondweed, and continue to explore measures to remove this invasive plant.

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

Maintain the existing pattern of hard winter grazing followed by summer grazing breaks in a manner that supports the profusion and diverse range of flowering plants typical of grazed machair.

Maintain cultivation at existing levels and encourage the continuation of traditional activities - the use of seaweed, stooking, stacking and natural fallows beneficial to wildlife.

Ensure activities do not adversely affect this habitat.

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 areas of long vegetation throughout the breeding season for breeding birds such as corncrakes.

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.

Climate change:

Global climate change is predicted to lead to changes in weather patterns and sea-level rise which could cause increased coastal erosion and threaten low-lying dune and machair systems. As sea level rises the drainage network is likely to become less efficient. Habitats may be modified in response to climate change.

Front page photograph: Loch Hallan

Date last reviewed: 31 March 2011