

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Monkstone House

City Road

Peterborough

Cambridgeshire PE1 1JY

UK

Telephone/Fax: +44 (0)1733 – 562 626 / +44 (0)1733 – 555 948

Email: RIS@JNCC.gov.uk

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 29 March 1999

3. Country:

UK (Scotland)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

North Uist Machair and Islands

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for: Updated information on an existing Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area:

** Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

7. Map of site included:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) *Yes*
- iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) **Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:**

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

57 32 00 N 07 22 45 W

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Nearest town/city: Lochmaddy

North Uist Machair and Islands lies on the west and north coasts of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides.

Administrative region: Western Isles / Na h-Eileanan an Iar

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): 11. Area (hectares): 4704.92

Min.	-1
Max.	96
Mean	10

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

North Uist Machair and Islands Ramsar site comprises a number of machair areas, which show a range of habitats, from intertidal sand and rock through sand dunes and dune slacks to a calcareous coastal plain and acid grassland. The site contains a range of freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs; important freshwater marshes and fens; wet and dry machair and saltmarsh. These areas are important for their breeding and wintering waterfowl. The machair on Robach and Newton SSSI is also notable for its geomorphological landforms within the sand dune and machair system.

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

6

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations

occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Ringed plover , *Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*, 240 pairs, representing an average of 2% of the breeding population (3 year mean, 1993-1995)
breeding in southern Scandinavia/Baltic, British Isles, N & E continental Europe; wintering in Europe, Med. & N Africa

Dunlin , *Calidris alpina schinzii*, 271 pairs, representing an average of 2.5% of the breeding population (1999-2000, 2003)
Baltic/UK/Ireland

Species with peak counts in winter:

Barnacle goose , *Branta leucopsis*, 1422 individuals, representing an average of 2.6% of the population (5 year peak mean for 1996/7-2000/01)
Greenland/Ireland, UK

Ringed plover , *Charadrius hiaticula*, 295 individuals, representing an average of 0.9% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Europe/Northwest Africa

Ruddy turnstone , *Arenaria interpres interpres*, 215 individuals, representing an average of 0.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
NE Canada, Greenland/W Europe & NW Africa

Species/populations identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration under criterion 6.

Species with peak counts in winter:

Greylag goose , *Anser anser anser*, Iceland/UK, 1861 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the population (5 year peak mean for 1996/7-2000/01)
Ireland

Contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which is updated annually. See www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm.

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

16. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	acidic, basic, neutral, shingle, sand, mud, peat, nutrient-rich, nutrient-poor, metamorphic, gravel, pebble, cobble, boulder
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, island, coastal, slope, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), open coast (including bay), enclosed coast (including embayment), pools, intertidal rock

Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	acidic, alkaline, circumneutral
Salinity	fresh, saline / euhaline
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Stornoway, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/stornoway.html) Max. daily temperature: 11.0° C Min. daily temperature: 5.6° C Days of air frost: 30.7 Rainfall: 1231.7 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1216.8

General description of the Physical Features:

North Uist Machair and Islands is a coastal site encompassing areas of rocky shore, sandy beaches and dunes, cultivated machair, saltmarsh, calcareous coastal plains and acid grassland. There are also important freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs, marshes and fens, and wet machair.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

North Uist Machair and Islands is a coastal site encompassing areas of rocky shore, sandy beaches and dunes, cultivated machair, saltmarsh, calcareous coastal plains and acid grassland. There are also important freshwater wetlands including eutrophic machair lochs, marshes and fens, and wet machair.

18. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

No special values known

19. Wetland types:

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	52.5
Other	Other	35
Tp	Freshwater marshes / pools: permanent	5
D	Rocky shores	5
O	Freshwater lakes: permanent	2
H	Salt marshes	0.5

20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

North Uist Machair and Islands comprises four sites on the west and north coasts of North Uist, and all or part of three islands in the Sound of Harris. All these components are dominated by sand dune and machair systems. The machair plain includes wet and dry machair, some of which is uncultivated. Associated with the machair are fine examples of nutrient-rich fen, marsh and bog, eutrophic machair lochs, saltmarsh and sandy and rocky shores. The site supports a rich and diverse range of plant

communities and includes some locally or nationally scarce plants and bryophytes. The coast, machair lochs and acidic blackland are of considerable ornithological importance for wintering and breeding birds.

Ecosystem services

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Assemblage

This site is internationally important because it contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I features:

- H1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines
- H1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- H2110 Embryonic shifting dunes
- H2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (“white dunes”)
- H2130 Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation (“grey dunes”)
- H2190 Humid dune slacks
- H21A0 Machairs
- H3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation

Internationally important species occurring on the site.

- S1833 *Najas flexilis* Slender naiad (Habitats Directive Annex II species)

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Higher Plants.

Dactylorhiza majalis scotica, *Equisetum variegatum*, *Potamogeton filiformis*, *Potamogeton rutilus*, *Potamogeton coloratus*, *Potamogeton friesii*, *Pilularia globulifera*, *Mertensia maritima*, and *Juncus balticus*

Lower Plants.

Chara spp., *Drepanocladus sendtneri*, *Drepanocladus polygamus*, *Tortella fragilis*, *Distichium inclinatum*, *Meesia uliginosa*, *Campylium elodes* and *Amblyodon dealbatus*.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Birds

Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , NW & C Europe | 13 pairs, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (Count for 1992, 1995) |
| Corn crane , <i>Crex crex</i> , Europe | 33 individuals, representing an average of 5.6% of the GB population (1998-2002) |
| Eurasian oystercatcher , <i>Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus</i> , Europe & NW Africa -wintering | 928 pairs, representing an average of 2.8% of the GB population (1999-2000, 2003) |
| Common redshank , <i>Tringa totanus brittanica</i> , Britain & Ireland breeding | 521 pairs, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (1999-2000, 2003) |

Little tern , *Sterna albifrons albifrons*, W Europe 54 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 2.7% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)

Species with peak counts in winter:

Sanderling , *Calidris alba*, Eastern Atlantic 335 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Purple sandpiper , *Calidris maritima maritima*, E Atlantic -wintering 191 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species Information

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Invertebrates.

Bombus distinguendus.

23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

- Aesthetic
- Archaeological/historical site
- Environmental education/ interpretation
- Livestock grazing
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Other
- Sport fishing
- Sport hunting
- Tourism
- Traditional cultural

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? No

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
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National/Crown Estate	+	
Private	+	
Public/communal	+	

25. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Collection of non-timber natural products: commercial	+	+
Collection of non-timber natural products: subsistence	+	+
Cutting of vegetation (small-scale/subsistence)	+	+
Fishing: commercial	+	+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	+
Shifting arable agriculture	+	
Rough or shifting grazing	+	+
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	+
Hay meadows	+	+
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Domestic water supply	+	+

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?
No factors reported	NA				

For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

27. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	
Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation	+	
Management agreement	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Other	+	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	

b) Describe any other current management practices:

The management of Ramsar sites in the UK is determined by either a formal management plan or through other management planning processes, and is overseen by the relevant statutory conservation agency. Details of the precise management practises are given in these documents.

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Birds.

- Corncrake surveys (RSPB/SNH) annual.
- Birds on RSPB reserve monitored every year.
- Breeding wader surveys in 1983, 1995 & 2000, wintering wader survey 1994-95 and 2004. Various national BTO surveys.
- Feasibility study for mink eradication, 1999
- Ongoing research into effects of hedgehogs on ground nesting birds (2000)
- Annual (Feb) barnacle goose count.

Invertebrates.

Survey of *Bombus distinguendus* in 1997, 2000

Habitat.

Freshwater vegetation surveyed in 1995. Machair vegetation surveyed 1995, 1988.

Machair and Freshwater Site Condition Monitoring 2004. Intertidal/marine Site Condition Monitoring 2004.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

The RSPB reserve at Balranald has a small visitor centre with interpretive panels and displays. There is a reserve leaflet and the RSPB hold guided walks during the summer for visitors and organised parties. The Balranald site has also been used to demonstrate habitat management for corncrakes to a variety of people and organisations.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

- Walking, including dog walking, birdwatching and mammal watching occur, at a fairly low level, over much of the site, all year. An exception to this, is the Balranald area which is an RSPB reserve and receives reasonably large numbers of visitors mainly in the summer. Visitors are asked to keep to a marked trail to avoid disturbance to breeding birds.
- Angling occurs from both shore and boat. Again this mainly occurs from April to September.
- North Uist Estates shoot over the parts of the site they own, whilst a syndicate of local crofters shoots over some of the SEERAD-owned ground at Balranald. Season 12 August to 20 February inclusive.

32. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Scottish Executive, Environment and Rural Affairs Department

33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

- Bainbridge, I, Walker, D & Gray, M (1994) *Winter bird surveys on proposed Special Protection Areas in Scotland*. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (unpublished report to Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh)
- Barne, JH, Robson, CF, Kaznowska, SS, Doody, JP, Davidson, NC & Buck, AL (eds.) (1997) *Coasts and seas of the United Kingdom. Regions 15 & 16. North-west Scotland: the Western Isles and west Highland*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. (Coastal Directories Series.)
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- Connor, DW & Little, M (1998) Chapter 14. Outer Hebrides (MNCR Sector 14). In: *Benthic marine ecosystems of Great Britain and the north-east Atlantic*, ed. by K. Hiscock, 371-383. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. (Coasts and Seas of the United Kingdom. MNCR series)
- Dargie, TCD (1993) *Sand dune vegetation survey of Great Britain: a national inventory. Part II: Scotland*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough
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- McLeod, CR, Yeo, M, Brown, AE, Burn, AJ, Hopkins, JJ & Way, SF (eds.) (2004) *The Habitats Directive: selection of Special Areas of Conservation in the UK*. 2nd edn. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. www.jncc.gov.uk/SACselection

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- Ratcliffe, DA (ed.) (1977) *A Nature Conservation Review. The selection of biological sites of national importance to nature conservation in Britain*. Cambridge University Press (for the Natural Environment Research Council and the Nature Conservancy Council), Cambridge (2 vols.)
- Ritchie, W (1971) *The beaches of Barra and the Uists. A survey of the beach, dune and machair areas of Barra, South Uist, North Uist and Berneray*. University of Aberdeen, Department of Geography, for Countryside Commission for Scotland, Perth. [Reprinted 2004 as *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report*, No. **047**]
- Scottish Natural Heritage (1998) *Machair*. Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh (Scotland's Living Landscapes)
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Please return to: **Ramsar Secretariat, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland**
Telephone: +41 22 999 0170 • Fax: +41 22 999 0169 • email: ramsar@ramsar.org