

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 05 May 2000 / Updated: May 2005

3. Country:

UK (England)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Thames Estuary and Marshes

5. Map of site included:**a) hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no***b) digital (electronic) format** (optional): Yes

6. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

51° 29' 08'' N 00° 35' 47'' E

7. General location:

Nearest town/city: Gravesend

Contains part of the north coast of Kent and part of the southern coast of Essex, straddling the Thames estuary.

Administrative region: Essex; Kent; Medway; Thurrock

8. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **9. Area** (hectares): 5589

Min. -5

Max. 5

Mean No information available

10. Overview:

A complex of brackish, floodplain grazing marsh ditches, saline lagoons and intertidal saltmarsh and mudflat. These habitats together support internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl. The saltmarsh and grazing marsh are of international importance for their diverse assemblages of wetland plants and invertebrates.

11. Ramsar Criteria:

2, 5, 6

12. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 11. above:

Ramsar criterion 2

The site supports more than 20 British Red Data Book invertebrates and populations of the GB Red Book endangered least lettuce (*Lactuca saligna*), as well as the vulnerable slender hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*), divided sedge (*Carex divisa*), sea barley (*Hordeum marinum*), Borrer's saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia fasciculata*), and dwarf eelgrass (*Zostera noltei*).

Ramsar criterion 5

Assemblages of international importance:

Species with peak counts in winter:

45,118 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

Ramsar criterion 6

Species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*, 1,640 individuals, representing an average of 4.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Iceland/W Europe

Species with peak counts in winter:

Dunlin , *Calidris alpina alpina*, W Siberia/W Europe 15,171 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Red knot , *Calidris canutus islandica*, W & Southern Africa 7,279 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
(wintering)

More 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 Alerts report, which is updated annually. See <http://www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm>.

13. Biogeography:

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

14. Physical features of the site:

Soil & geology	alluvium, mud, shingle
Geomorphology and landscape	coastal, floodplain, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), estuary
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	no information
Salinity	brackish / mixosaline, fresh, saline / euhaline
Soil	no information
Water permanence	usually permanent, usually seasonal / intermittent

Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Greenwich, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/greenwich.html) Max. daily temperature: 14.8° C Min. daily temperature: 7.2° C Days of air frost: 29.1 Rainfall: 583.6 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1461.0
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General description of the Physical Features:

No information available

15. Physical features of the catchment area:

No information available

16. Hydrological values:

Shoreline stabilisation and dissipation of erosive forces, sediment trapping, flood water storage / desynchronisation of flood peaks, maintenance of water quality (removal of nutrients)

17. Wetland types

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	0.8
G	Tidal flats	49.6
H	Salt marshes	1.3
O	Freshwater lakes: permanent	0.7
Q	Saline / brackish lakes: permanent	4.2
Ss	Saline / brackish marshes: seasonal / intermittent	3.2
4	Seasonally flooded agricultural land	38.6
Other	Other	1.6

18. General ecological features:

The intertidal flats are mostly fine, silty sediment, though in parts they are sandy. The saltmarsh shows a transition from pioneer communities containing *Zostera* to saltmarsh dominated by, for example, *Atriplex portulacoides*. The grazing marsh grassland is mesotrophic and generally species-poor. It does, however, contain scattered rarities, mostly annuals characteristic of bare ground. Where the grassland is seasonally inundated and the marshes are brackish the plant communities are intermediate between those of mesotrophic grassland and those of saltmarsh. The grazing marsh ditches contain a range of flora of brackish and fresh water. The aquatic flora is a mosaic of successional stages resulting from periodic clearance of drainage channels. The dominant emergent plants are *Phragmites communis* and *Bolboschoenus maritimus*. The saline lagoons have a diverse molluscan and crustacean fauna. Dominant plants in the lagoons include *Ulva* and *Chaetomorpha*.

19. Noteworthy flora:

Nationally important species occurring on the site:

Higher plants:

The site supports a population of the endangered least lettuce *Lactuca saligna*, and also supports several nationally scarce plants, including bulbous foxtail *Alopecurus bulbosus*, slender hare's-ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum*, divided sedge *Carex divisa*, saltmarsh goosefoot *Chenopodium chenopodioides*, sea barley *Hordeum marinum*, golden samphire *Inula crithmoides*, annual beard grass *Polypogon monspeliensis*, Borrer's saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia fasciculata*, stiff saltmarsh-grass *P. rupestris*, one-flowered glasswort *Salicornia pusilla*, clustered clover *Trifolium glomeratum*, sea clover *T. squamosum*, narrow-leaved eelgrass *Zostera angustifolia* and dwarf eelgrass *Z. noltei*.

20. Noteworthy fauna:**Birds****Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:**

Common greenshank , <i>Tringa nebularia</i> , Europe/W Africa	38 individuals, representing an average of 6.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Little egret , <i>Egretta garzetta</i> , West Mediterranean	54 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Little grebe , <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis ruficollis</i> , Europe to E Urals, NW Africa	251 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Ruff , <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> , Europe/W Africa	23 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)

Species with peak counts in winter:

Common shelduck , <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> , NW Europe	1238 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Gadwall , <i>Anas strepera strepera</i> , NW Europe	359 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , NW & C Europe	288 individuals, representing an average of 1.9% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Pied avocet , <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> , Europe/Northwest Africa	607 individuals, representing an average of 17.8% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Spotted redshank , <i>Tringa erythropus</i> , Europe/W Africa	6 individuals, representing an average of 4.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)
Water rail , <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> , Europe	6 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)

Species Information

Nationally important species occurring on the site:

Invertebrates:

The endangered species *Bagous longitarsis* occurs on the site.

The following vulnerable species occur on the site: a groundbug *Henestaris halophilus*, a weevil *Bagous cylindrus*, a ground beetle *Polystichus connexus*, a crane fly *Erioptera bivittata*, a crane fly *Limnophila pictipennis*, a horse fly *Hybomitra expollicata*, a hoverfly *Lejops vittata*, a dancefly *Poecilobothrus ducalis*, a snail-killing fly *Pteromicra leucopeza*, a solitary wasp *Philanthus triangulum* and a damselfly *Lestes dryas*.

The following rare species occur on the site: a ground beetle *Anisodactylus poeciloides*, the water beetles *Aulacochthebius exaratus*, *Berosus fulvus*, *Cercyon bifenestratus*, *Hydrochus elongatus*, *H. ignicollis*, *Ochthebius exaratus* and *Hydrophilus piceus*, a beetle *Malachius vulneratus*, a rove beetle *Philonthus punctus*, a fungus beetle *Telmatophilus brevicollis*, a fly *Campsicnemus magius*, a horsefly *Haematopota bigoti*, a soldier fly *Stratiomys longicornis* and a spider *Baryphyma duffeyi*.

21. Social and cultural values:

Aesthetic
 Archaeological/historical site
 Conservation education
 Current scientific research
 Fisheries production
 Livestock grazing
 Non-consumptive recreation
 Sport fishing
 Sport hunting
 Tourism
 Transportation/navigation

22. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
Non-governmental organisation	+	+
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	+
Private	+	+
Public/communal	+	

23. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Research	+	+
Fishing: commercial	+	
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	
Gathering of shellfish	+	
Bait collection	+	
Arable agriculture (unspecified)		+
Permanent arable agriculture		+
Livestock watering hole/pond	+	+
Grazing (unspecified)	+	+
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	+
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	
Industrial water supply		+
Industry		+
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Harbour/port	+	+
Flood control	+	
Transport route	+	+
Urban development		+
Military activities	+	

24. Factors 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?
Dredging	1		+	+	+
Erosion	2		+		+
Eutrophication	2	Studies by the Environment Agency indicate that the waters in the Thames estuary are hyper-nitrified for nitrogen and phosphorus.	+	+	+
General disturbance from human activities	1		+		+

For category 2 factors only.

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

Erosion - The North Kent Coastal Habitat Management Plan (CHaMP) has been produced. The Environment Agency is producing a Flood Defence Strategy for the Thames (Thames 2100) and decisions on future flood risk management will need to take into account the effects on features within the designated sites.

Studies of sediment transport and hydrodynamics within Thames estuary. Investigation of beneficial use of dredgings for mudflat recharge and creation of compensatory habitat.

Eutrophication - Water quality and sources of nutrient inputs are subject to further investigation by the Environment Agency as part of the Agency's review of consents under the Habitats Regulations. Stage 3 of the Review of Consents (appropriate assessment) is scheduled for completion by March 2006, at which point any consented discharges having an adverse effect on site integrity will be identified.

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? YES

25. Conservation measures taken:

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
SSSI / ASSI	+	
SPA	+	
Land owned by a NGO for nature conservation	+	+
Management agreement	+	

Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
ESA	+	+

26. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

No information available

27. Current scientific research and facilities:

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Numbers of breeding waders have been monitored through the BTO/RSPB/English Nature/Defra survey Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows (2002).

Botanical surveys of vegetation of sea wall embankments and grazing marsh ditches have been carried out.

The distribution and extent of saltmarsh habitat has been mapped - North Kent Marshes Saltmarsh Survey (2002) (Blair-Myres 2003)

The RSPB monitors various species groups on its reserves within the site

28. Current conservation education:

The RSPB manages a network of reserves within and adjacent to the site, which are promoted locally through existing community initiatives, and more widely through publications and via the internet.

The site forms part of proposals for a north Kent 'Regional Park', being promoted to balance development in Kent Thameside (part of the Thames Gateway growth area). The Management Guidance for the Thames Estuary aims to increase awareness of conservation and is promoted by the Thames Estuary Partnership. The Thames Estuary Partnership has also produced the Tidal Thames Habitat Action Plan to raise awareness of and address biodiversity issues.

29. Current recreation and tourism:

Yachting, angling, wildfowling, jet-skiing, water-skiing and birdwatching. Bird watching occurs throughout the year and wildfowling is restricted to the period September to February. The remaining activities occur year-round but are more prevalent in the summer months. Disturbance from these activities is a current issue but is being addressed through further research, negotiation and information dissemination.

30. Jurisdiction:

Head, Natura 2000 and Ramsar Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, European Wildlife Division, Zone 1/07, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB

31. Management authority:

Site Designations Manager, English Nature, Sites and Surveillance Team, Northminster House, Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, UK

32. Bibliographical references:**Site-relevant references**

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