

## 18. Abberton Reservoir

**Geographical Coordinates** 51°49'N 0°52'E

**Area** 716ha

**Location** About 7km south-south-west of the city of Colchester, in the county of Essex, south-east England.

**Date of Ramsar Designation** Original designation 24 July 1981; site reduced from 1,228ha on 20 September 1990.

**Other International Designations** Special Protection Area under EC Directive 79/409.

**National Designations** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Statutory Bird Sanctuary.

**Principal Features** A large storage reservoir, with three separate basins, created between 1939 and 1941 by damming a small river and flooding a long, shallow valley. Most of the water contained in the reservoir is pumped from the River Stour, some 15km to the north. Abberton is less than 5km from the coast and is an important moulting, passage and wintering site for Anatidae. Peak counts of wintering water birds regularly exceed 20,000 individuals (34,732\*), including internationally important numbers\* of *Anas strepera* (482), *A. crecca* (4,569) and *A. clypeata* (636) and nationally important numbers of several other species, notably *Fulica atra* (11,329). Moulting concentrations of Anatidae in late summer include nationally important numbers of *Cygnus olor*, *Aythya ferina* and *A. fuligula*. The damp, unimproved pasture bordering parts of the reservoir support feeding waders in winter, whilst, in other areas, improved grassland is important for grazing *Anas penelope*. The site also supports the UK's only tree-nesting colony of *Phalacrocorax carbo* (360 pairs in 1990). (2c,3a,3b,3c)

\*All figures are average peak counts for the five winters 1987/88 to 1991/92.

**Conservation Issues** The UK authorities reduced the Ramsar site by some 512ha in 1990, when Abberton Reservoir was re-notified as an SSSI under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. The (then) Nature Conservancy Council had determined that the original SSSI included agricultural land of no particular conservation value, which would be excluded from the re-notified SSSI. The Ramsar site was reduced at the same time, in line with the UK Government's stated policy that all territory included under Ramsar designations must have SSSI status.