

51. Exe Estuary

Geographical Coordinates 50°37'N 3°25'W

Area 2,389ha

Location About 5km south-east of the city of Exeter, in the county of Devon, south-west England.

Date of Ramsar Designation 11 March 1992.

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

National Designations Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Local Nature Reserve^P (LNR).

Principal Features The estuary includes shallow offshore waters, extensive mud and sand flats, and limited areas of saltmarsh. The site boundary also embraces part of Exeter Canal; Exminster Marshes - a complex of marshes and damp pasture towards the head of the estuary; and Dawlish Warren - an extensive recurved sand-dune system which has developed across the mouth of the estuary. Average peak counts of wintering water birds regularly exceed 20,000 individuals (23,268*), including internationally important numbers* of *Branta bernicla bernicla* (2,343). Species wintering in nationally important numbers* include *Podiceps auritus*, *Haematopus ostralegus*, *Recurvirostra avosetta* (311), *Pluvialis squatarola*, *Calidris alpina* and *Limosa limosa* (594). Because of its relatively mild climate and sheltered location, the site assumes even greater importance as a refuge during spells of severe weather. Nationally important numbers of *Charadrius hiaticula* and *Tringa nebularia* occur on passage. Parts of the site are managed as nature reserves by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and by the local authority. (1a,3a,3b,3c)

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

Conservation Issues No reports of any problems have been received; a comprehensive management plan is being drawn up for the site.