

## 71. Benfleet and Southend Marshes

**Geographical Coordinates:** 51°32'N 0°40'E **Area:** 2,251ha

**Location:** On the northern side of the outer Thames estuary, between Canvey Island and the town of Southend-on-Sea, in the county of Essex, south-east England.

**Date of Ramsar Designation:** 14 February 1994

**Other International Designations:** European Union Special Protection Area

**National Designations:** Site of special scientific interest (SSSI); Eutrophic sensitive area<sup>P</sup>; National nature reserve<sup>P</sup>; Country park

**Principal Features:** Benfleet and Southend Marshes comprises an area of intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, scrub and grassland. The site is regularly host to over 20,000 waterfowl in winter. During the five year period 1985/86 to 1989/90 an average peak of 30,400 birds was recorded, comprising 22,800 waders and 7,600 wildfowl. During this period the site also supported internationally important wintering populations of the following migratory waterfowl species: 7,200+ *Branta bernicla bernicla* (4% of the world population); 2,500 *Pluvialis squatarola* (1% of the east Atlantic flyway pop.); and 8,400 *Calidris canutus* (2% of E. Atlantic flyway pop.). Notable also are nationally important wintering populations of *Charadrius hiaticula* and *Calidris alpina*. (Criteria 3a,3c).

**Conservation Issues:** The site is used for fishing (commercial and recreational), bait and shellfish gathering, sewage treatment and disposal, permanent pastoral grazing, conservation and birdwatching and other recreation. The eastern end of the site is subject to The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994 (granted to the Kent and Essex Fisheries Committee), a measure designed to limit exploitation of cockle stocks in decline. There is no current management plan for the site.