

1. Country: Ireland
2. Date: 16 February 1995
3. Ref: 7IE025
4. Name of wetland: Malahide Estuary

Malahide Estuary is situated immediately north of Malahide and east of Swords. It is the estuary of the River Broadmeadow. The site is divided by a railway viaduct.

The outer part of the estuary is mostly cut off from the sea by a large sand spit, known as "the island". The outer estuary drains almost completely at low tide, exposing sand and mud flats. There is a large bed of Eelgrass (*Zostera noltii* and *Z. angustifolium*) in the north section of the outer estuary, along with Tassel Weed (*Ruppia maritima*) and extensive mats of green algae (*Enteromorpha* spp., *Ulva lactuca*). Cordgrass (*Spartina anglica*) is also widespread in this sheltered part of the estuary.

The dune spit has a well developed outer dune ridge dominated by Marram Grass (*Ammophila arenaria*). The dry areas of the stabilised dunes have a dense covering of Burnet Rose (*Rosa spinosissima*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and species such as Yellow Wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Field Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*), Hound's Tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). Much of the interior of the spit is taken up by a golf course though there are a number of rough areas and slacks. The inner stoney shore has frequent Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*). Well-developed saltmarshes occur at the tip of the spit.

The inner estuary does not drain at low tide apart from the extreme inner part. Here patches of saltmarsh and salt meadows occur, with Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and Sea Clubrush (*Scirpus maritimus*). Tassel Weed (*Ruppia maritima*) occurs in one of the channels. The site includes a fine area of rocky shore south-east of Malahide.

The estuary is an important wintering bird site. Average maximum counts during the 1984/85 - 1986/87 period were Brent Geese 851; Great Crested Grebe 73; Mute Swan 106; Shelduck 335; Pochard 327; Goldeneye 268; Red-breasted Merganser 62; Oystercatcher 841; Golden Plover 1,500; Grey Plover 97; Redshank 415; Wigeon 119; Teal 235; Ringed Plover 43; Knot 130; Dunlin 465; Greenshank 16. The Brent population is of international importance. The high numbers of diving birds reflects the lagoon type nature of the inner estuary.

The estuary also attracts migrant species such as Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint. Breeding birds of the site include Ringed Plover, Shelduck and Mallard. Up to the 1950's there was a major tern colony at the southern end of the island and the habitat remains suitable for these birds.

The inner part of the estuary is heavily used for water sports. A section of the outer estuary has recently been claimed for a marina and housing.

This site is a fine example of an estuarine system with all the main habitats represented. The site is important ornithologically, with a population of Brent Geese of international significance.