

### 63. Hamford Water

**Geographical Coordinates:** 51°53'N 1°15'E **Area:** 2,179ha

**Location:** On the North Sea coast, approximately 20km east of the city of Colchester, in the county of Essex, southeast England.

**Date of Ramsar Designation:** 8 June 1993

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

**National Designations:** Hamford Water National Nature Reserve<sup>P</sup>; Site of special scientific interest; Two Essex wildlife trusts; Environmentally sensitive area.

**Principal Features:** A wide, shallow, estuarine basin containing an extensive network of tidal creeks and scattered islands. The site includes substantial areas of intertidal sand-flats, mud-flats (supporting beds of *Zostera* spp.) and associated saltmarsh. One of the rarest coastal plants in Britain, *Peucedanum officinale*, has its centre of distribution at Hamford Water, while other notable plants include *Limonium binervosum* and *L. humile*. Two separate areas of dune-topped shingle spits support a well-developed flora characteristic of the lime-rich sand. Wintering water birds include internationally important numbers<sup>1</sup> of *Branta bernicla bernicla* (4,647), *Charadrius hiaticula* (694), and *Limosa limosa* (1,501). Several other species occur in nationally important numbers<sup>1</sup>, notably *Recurvirostra avosetta* (166), *Pluvialis squatarola* (1,373) and *Tringa totanus* (1,139). Nesting birds include nationally important numbers of *Sterna albifrons*. (Criteria 3c).

<sup>1</sup>Figures refer to average peak counts during the five winters 1987/88 to 1991/92.

**Conservation Issues:** The site contains a harbour and is used for commercial and subsistence fishing, bait fishing, mariculture, recreational hunting, industry, hay growing and grazing as well as conservation. The site continues to suffer from long-term erosion due to relative sea-level rise. This has resulted in a loss of saltmarsh vegetation and a decline in breeding success of waders such as *Tringa totanus* (UK 1996 Ramsar National Report).