

The Deben Estuary (Suffolk)

The Deben Estuary proposed Ramsar site extends for about 18km from the mouth of the estuary at Felixtowe, on the east coast of Suffolk to near the tidal limit above Wilford Bridge. It is a relatively narrow and sheltered estuary with a limited amount of freshwater input and intertidal areas constrained by sea walls. Saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats occupy the majority of the site but there are also areas of reedswamp, unimproved neutral grassland and scrub. The estuary is largely surrounded by agricultural land.

The boundary of the site is coincident with the Deben Estuary SSSI, notified in 1991, and overlaps with the Ferry Cliff, and Sutton and Ramsholt Cliff geological SSSIs. The site includes all land above mean low water mark up to an inland boundary that follows variable features such as the upper limit of wetland habitat or the sea wall.

The site qualifies under Criterion 2a of the Ramsar Convention by supporting a population of the Endangered Red Data Book mollusc *Vertigo augustior*. Martlesham Creek within the proposed Ramsar site is one of only fourteen sites in Britain where this species survives.

The site qualifies under Criterion 3c by regularly supporting internationally important wintering numbers of dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicula bernicula*. The five year peak mean for the period 1988/89 to 1992/93 was 1,889 birds, representing 2.1% of the British and 1.1% of the north-west European population. Notable also are nationally important numbers of the following migratory waterfowl (figures are five year winter peak means for the period 1988/89 to 1992/93): 1,046 shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (1.4% of the British population); 57 avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (11.4% of British); 252 grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (1.2% of British); 143 black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* (2.9% of British); and 1,454 redshank *Tringa totanus* (1.9% of British).

The site also supports a notable assemblage of breeding and wintering wetland birds in addition to the species mentioned above. Breeding species include shelduck, gadwall *Anas strepera*, teal *A. crecca*, shoveler *A. clypeata*, redshank, oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. Wintering species include cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, teal, pintail *Anas acuta*, wigeon *A. penelope*, goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, coot *Fulica atra*, oystercatcher, ringed plover, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, snipe, curlew *Numenius arquata*, turnstone *neria interpres*, short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and twite *Carduelis flavirostris*. The estuary is more important for many species of waterfowl in years when severe weather reduces food resources available on the continent.