

**EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds:
Special Protection Area**

The Deben Estuary (Suffolk)

The Deben Estuary Special Protection Area (SP A) extends for about 18km from the mouth of the estuary at Felixstowe, 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 mud flats 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 SPA 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 Article 4.1 of the EC Birds Directive by regularly supporting nationally important numbers of avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, an Annex 1 species. The five year winter peak mean for the period 1988/89 to 1992/93 was 57 birds, representing 11.4% of the British population. Further Annex 1 species wintering on the site include golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* and short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*.

The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive by regularly supporting internationally important numbers of dark-bellied geese, *Branta bernicula bernicula*, a regularly occurring migratory species. The five year winter 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. In addition the site supports 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); 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*, coot *Fulica atra*, oystercatcher, ringed plover, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, snipe, curlew *Numenius arquata*, turnstone *Areneria interpres* 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.

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