

EC Directive 79/409 on the conservation of wild birds: Special Protection Area

Abberton Reservoir (Essex)

Abberton Reservoir is a large water storage reservoir lying about four miles south of Colchester. In numerical terms, Abberton is the most important reservoir in Great Britain for wintering wildfowl. It owes this position to its proximity to the coast and to the strict protection given to the site. Most of the SSSI is statutorily protected by the Wild Birds (Abberton Reservoir Sanctuary) Order 1967.

Abberton reservoir qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting a nationally important breeding population of cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (360 pairs, 5% of the British breeding population). This colony is unusual in Great Britain because the birds are nesting in trees inland, rather than on coastal cliff ledges or rocky islets.

The reservoir qualifies also under Article 4.2 as a Wetland of International Importance by regularly supporting, in winter, in excess of 20,000 waterfowl. In the five year period 1985/86 to 1989/90 the average peak count was 34,000, wildfowl. The site regularly supports internationally or nationally important wintering populations of the following ten species of migratory waterfowl (average peak counts for the 5 winter period 1985/86 to 1989/90): 8,400 wigeon *Anas penelope* (1% of North West European (NW) population, 3% of British wintering population); 480 gadwall *Anas strepera* (4% of NW European, 8% of British); 180 great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (2% of British); 500 mute swan *Cygnus olor* (3% of British) ; 480 shoveler *Anas clypeata* (1% of NW European, 5% of British); 2,200 teal *Anas crecca* (2% of British); 2,400 pochard *Aythya ferina* (1% of British); 3,500 tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* (2% of British); 560 goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (3% of British); and 11,500 coot *Fulica atra* (10% of British).

In addition, the site qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting, in the late summer, substantial concentrations of five migratory wildfowl species (peak August counts for the five year period 1985-89): 450 mute swan (3% of British wintering population); 110 gadwall; 420 shoveler; 2,700 pochard; and 2,700 tufted duck. Many of these birds moult at the site.

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