

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 16 February 1995 / Updated: May 2005

3. Country:

UK (England)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Ribble and Alt Estuaries

5. Map of site included:**a) hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no***b) digital (electronic) format** (optional): Yes

6. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

53° 42' 41'' N

02° 58' 44'' W

7. General location:

Nearest town/city: Preston

The site occupies a stretch of coastline between Liverpool and Preston on the north-west coast of England. It lies between the Mersey estuary and Morecambe Bay.

Administrative region: Lancashire; Merseyside; Sefton

8. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **9. Area** (hectares): 13,464

Min. 0

Max. 25

Mean No information available

10. Overview:

A large area including two estuaries which form part of the chain of west coast sites which fringe the Irish Sea. The site is formed by extensive sand and mudflats backed, in the north, by the saltmarsh of the Ribble Estuary and, to the south, the sand dunes of the Sefton Coast. The tidal flats and saltmarsh support internationally important populations of waterfowl in winter and the sand dunes support vegetation communities and amphibian populations of international importance.

11. Ramsar Criteria:

2, 5, 6

Secretariat Comment: The RIS provides information requiring the application of Criterion 4. This need to be included in the next update.

12. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 11. above:

Ramsar criterion 2

This site supports up to 40% of the Great Britain population of natterjack toads *Bufo calamita*. As plant species: *Petalophyllum ralfsii* (Conservation status: European Red List: Vulnerable; EC Habitats Directive: Annex II)

Ramsar criterion 5

Assemblages of international importance:

Species with peak counts in winter:

222,038 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

Ramsar criterion 6

Species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Black-tailed godwit , <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i> , Iceland/W Europe	3323 individuals, representing an average of 7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common redshank , <i>Tringa totanus totanus</i> ,	4465 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Dunlin , <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i> , W Siberia/W Europe	38,196 individuals, representing an average of 2.8% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)
Grey plover , <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> , E Atlantic/W Africa -wintering	11,021 individuals, representing an average of 4.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)
Red knot , <i>Calidris canutus islandica</i> , W & Southern Africa (wintering)	42,692 individuals, representing an average of 9.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Ringed plover , <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> , Europe/Northwest Africa	3761 individuals, representing an average of 5.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)
Sanderling , <i>Calidris alba</i> , Eastern Atlantic	7401 individuals, representing an average of 6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)
Species with peak counts in winter:	
Bar-tailed godwit , <i>Limosa lapponica lapponica</i> , W Palearctic	13,935 individuals, representing an average of 11.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian oystercatcher , <i>Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus</i> , Europe & NW Africa -wintering	18,926 individuals, representing an average of 1.8% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian teal , <i>Anas crecca</i> , NW Europe	5107 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Eurasian wigeon , <i>Anas penelope</i> , NW Europe	69,841 individuals, representing an average of 4.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern pintail , <i>Anas acuta</i> , NW Europe	1,497 individuals, representing an average of 2.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Pink-footed goose , <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> , Greenland, Iceland/UK	6,552 individuals, representing an average of 2.42% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Tundra swan , <i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i> , NW Europe	230 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Whooper swan , <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> , Iceland/UK/Ireland	211 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

More contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey Alerts report, which is updated annually. See <http://www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm>.

13. Biogeography:

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

14. Physical features of the site:

Soil & geology	basic, neutral, sand, alluvium, sedimentary
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, coastal, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), open coast (including bay), estuary
Nutrient status	mesotrophic
pH	alkaline, circumneutral
Salinity	brackish / mixosaline, saline / euhaline
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Blackpool, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/blackpool.html) Max. daily temperature: 12.9° C Min. daily temperature: 6.4° C Days of air frost: 40.3 Rainfall: 871.3 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1540.3

General description of the Physical Features:

No information available

15. Physical features of the catchment area:

No information available

16. Hydrological values:

Shoreline stabilisation and dissipation of erosive forces, Sediment trapping

17. Wetland types

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	8
G	Tidal flats	75
H	Salt marshes	16
Ts	Freshwater marshes / pools: seasonal / intermittent	1

18. General ecological features:

The Ribble and Alt Estuaries contain extensive areas of intertidal sand and mudflats. These are backed by, on the Ribble, one of the most extensive areas of grazed saltmarsh in Britain and, along the Sefton Coast, the largest calcareous dune complex in north-western England.

The intertidal flats support internationally important populations of waterfowl which feed on a rich invertebrate fauna and *Enteromorpha* beds.

The saltmarsh supports a range of vegetation communities typical of north-west England maintained by stable grazing regimes. However, the estuary is accreting in response to large-scale land-claim, with *Spartina anglica* dominant in the pioneer stages with *Festuca rubra* and *Puccinellia maritima* dominating the grazed sward. Natural transitions are prevented by coastal defence structures. Small areas of saltmarsh also occur in discrete locations along the Sefton Coast.

The sand dunes display a full range of plant communities and habitat types from embryo to grey dunes with transitions to dune grassland and heath. Numerous species-rich slacks can be found throughout the dune transition but generally the extent of vegetation cover and species diversity increases with distance from the sea. *Elytrigia juncea* and *Elymus arenarius* dominate the embryo dunes (NVC SD5&7), being replaced by *Ammophila arenaria* in the mobile yellow dunes (SD6); large areas of bare sand are still present. Two distinct types of vegetation dominate the extensive grey dunes, the first a *Festuca rubra*/*Rubus caesius* dune pasture and a *Salix repens*/*R. caesius*/dwarf shrub (SD9 variants). These dunes also support two large coniferous plantations which support a distinctive flora.

Elsewhere, and in the absence of management, smaller areas of secondary deciduous scrub/woodland remain including *Hippophae rhamnoides* and various *Populus* spp. Dune slacks are regularly found throughout the dune complex. Normally dominated by creeping willow, they also support a diverse flora including the nationally rare liverwort, *Petalophyllum ralfsii* and dune helleborine *Epipactis dunensis* (SD15&16). Dune grassland and heath occupy fragmented locations on the extreme eastern edge of the system with *Calluna vulgaris* and *Carex arenaria* both strong characteristics.

The dune system is a candidate Special Area of Conservation for the following Annex I habitats: dunes with creeping willow; shifting dunes; humid dune slacks; shifting dunes with marram; petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii*; great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*; coastal dune heathland; and dune grassland ('grey dunes'). The last two are priority habitat types under the EC Habitats Directive.

19. Noteworthy flora:

International importance

Lower plants

Petalophyllum ralfsii (Conservation status: European Red List: Vulnerable; EC Habitats Directive: Annex II)

20. Noteworthy fauna:**Birds****Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species regularly supported during the breeding season:**

Black-headed gull, *Larus ridibundus*, N & C 14888 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 11.6% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)

Common tern , <i>Sterna hirundo hirundo</i> , N & E Europe	182 pairs, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (1996)
Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:	
Common greenshank , <i>Tringa nebularia</i> , Europe/W Africa	9 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian curlew , <i>Numenius arquata arquata</i> , N. a. arquata Europe (breeding)	2502 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Ruff , <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> , Europe/W Africa	60 individuals, representing an average of 8.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Species with peak counts in winter:	
Black (common) scoter , <i>Melanitta nigra nigra</i> ,	691 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Black-headed gull , <i>Larus ridibundus</i> , N & C Europe	16849 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
European golden plover, <i>Pluvialis apricaria apricaria</i> , Iceland & Faroes/E Atlantic	3588 individuals, representing an average of 1.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Great cormorant , <i>Phalacrocorax carbo carbo</i> , NW Europe	463 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , NW & C Europe	200 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Red-throated diver , <i>Gavia stellata</i> , NW Europe	56 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Spotted redshank , <i>Tringa erythropus</i> , Europe/W Africa	2 individuals, representing an average of 1.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species Information

Species occurring at levels of national importance:
 Natterjack toad *Bufo calamita* (c. 40% GB population)

21. Social and cultural values:

- Aesthetic
- Archaeological/historical site
- Conservation education
- Current scientific research
- Fisheries production
- Livestock grazing
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Sport fishing
- Sport hunting
- Tourism
- Transportation/navigation

22. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
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Non-governmental organisation	+	+
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	+
National/Crown estate	+	+
Private	+	+
Public/communal	+	+

23. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Research	+	
Fishing: commercial	+	+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	+
Gathering of shellfish	+	
Bait collection	+	
Permanent arable agriculture		+
Grazing (unspecified)	+	
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	
Industry	+	
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Harbour/port		+
Flood control	+	+
Irrigation (inc agricultural water supply)		+
Mineral exploration	+	
Oil/gas exploration		+
Oil/gas production		+
Transport route	+	+
Urban development		+
Military activities		+

24. Factors adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. *Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.*
2. *Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.*

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?

Erosion	2	Coastal erosion is a factor at Formby Point with an estimated loss of 4 metres per year. It is a concern because pine woodland on the sand dunes is causing coastal squeeze and therefore preventing sand dune habitats from rolling back; as such dune slack habitats for natterjack toads are declining/being lost.	+		+
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For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Erosion - At Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve English Nature have made efforts to restore dune habitat; an Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out with a view to submitting a tree-felling application in February 2005.

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

25. Conservation measures taken:

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
SSSI / ASSI	+	+
NNR	+	
SPA	+	
Land owned by a NGO for nature conservation	+	
Management agreement	+	
SAC	+	
Management plan in preparation	+	

26. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

No information available

27. Current scientific research and facilities:

Contemporary.

Fauna.

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Annual natterjack toad monitoring programme: Leisure Services, Metropolitan Borough of Sefton and English Nature Ainsdale NNR.

Completed.

Flora.

National sand dune survey. Sefton coast NCC Report (Edmondson *et al.* 1989)

Bryophyte surveys (various) of Sefton Coast (M Newton).

Ribble and Alt NVC saltmarsh survey 2002 (The Environment Partnership 2003)

Fauna.

Invertebrate surveys (numerous)

Documents held by various authorities on the coast including English Nature & Metropolitan Borough of Sefton.

For a full account of reports, papers etc, reference should be made to:

The sand dunes of the Sefton Coast (Atkinson & Houston 1993).

28. Current conservation education:

The Metropolitan Borough of Sefton, English Nature, National Trust and RSPB all lead guided walks onto suitable areas of the coast at all times of the year.

The entire site is reasonably well provided with fixed interpretation panels at many of the main public access points around the site.

The RSPB is developing educational/visitor facilities at its Reserve.

Southport Pier is developing into a major wildlife interpretation centre. English Nature, RSPB and Sefton Council are working on the project.

29. Current recreation and tourism:

Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.

Infrastructure developments

There are caravan parks adjacent to the site at Formby and moorings in the Alt. No major expansion anticipated.

Land-based recreation

There is intensive recreational use of the northern beaches (Southport & Ainsdale) where traditional activities are concentrated. These include beach car parking, and, during the summer months several large-scale events. Elsewhere, recreation is more informal and less intensive - but all beach activities on the Sefton Coast are managed by the Beach Management Plan. The golf courses are heavily used; Royal Birkdale hosted the British Open Golf Championship in 1998.

Water-based recreation

Mainly a summer activity based on the beach at Southport. Becoming more common but has, in the past, included pleasure trips on hovercraft.

Airborne recreation

Some disturbance in winter months by micro-lights, particularly to pink-footed goose populations.

Wildfowling

Occurs on extensive areas of the Ribble including the NNR. Usually controlled by agreement.

30. Jurisdiction:

Head, Natura 2000 and Ramsar Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, European Wildlife Division, Zone 1/07, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB

31. Management authority:

Site Designations Manager, English Nature, Sites and Surveillance Team, Northminster House, Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, UK

32. Bibliographical references:

Site-relevant references

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