

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

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**2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:**

Designated: 30 March 1988 / Updated: May 2005

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**3. Country:**

UK (England)

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**4. Name of the Ramsar site:**

The Wash

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**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

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**6. Geographical coordinates** (latitude/longitude):

52° 56' 16'' N      00° 17' 12'' E

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**7. General location:**

Nearest town/city: King's Lynn

The Wash is located on the east coast of England between the coastal towns of Hunstanton in north Norfolk and Skegness in Lincolnshire.

**Administrative region:** Lincolnshire; Norfolk

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**8. Elevation** (average and/or max. & min.) (metres):    **9. Area** (hectares): 62,212

Min.      No information available

Max.      No information available

Mean      No information available

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**10. Overview:**

The Wash is the largest estuarine system in Britain. It is fed by the rivers Witham, Welland, Nene and Great Ouse. There are extensive saltmarshes, intertidal banks of sand and mud, shallow waters and deep channels. It is the most important staging post and over-wintering site for migrant wildfowl and wading birds in eastern England. It supports a valuable commercial fishery for shellfish and also an important nursery area for flatfish. It holds one of the North Sea's largest breeding populations of common seal *Phoca vitulina* and some grey seals *Halichoerus grypus*. The sublittoral area supports a number of different marine communities including colonies of the reef-building polychaete worm *Sabellaria spinulosa*.

**11. Ramsar Criteria:**

**1, 3, 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 1

The Wash is a large shallow bay comprising very extensive saltmarshes, major intertidal banks of sand and mud, shallow water and deep channels. It is the largest estuarine system in Britain.

Ramsar criterion 3

Qualifies because of the inter-relationship between its various components including saltmarshes, intertidal sand and mud flats and the estuarine waters. The saltmarshes and the plankton in the estuarine water provide a primary source of organic material which, together with other organic matter, forms the basis for the high productivity of the estuary.

Ramsar criterion 5

**Assemblages of international importance:**

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

292,541 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 with peak counts in spring/autumn:**

Common redshank , <i>Tringa totanus totanus</i> ,	6,373 individuals, representing an average of 2.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian curlew , <i>Numenius arquata arquata</i> , N. a. <i>arquata</i> Europe (breeding)	9,438 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian oystercatcher , <i>Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus</i> , Europe & NW Africa -wintering	15,616 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Grey plover , <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> , E Atlantic/W Africa -wintering	13,129 individuals, representing an average of 5.2% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)
Red knot , <i>Calidris canutus islandica</i> , W & Southern Africa (wintering)	68,987 individuals, representing an average of 15.3% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Sanderling , <i>Calidris alba</i> , Eastern Atlantic	3,505 individuals, representing an average of 2.9% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

Black-headed gull , <i>Larus ridibundus</i> , N & C Europe	31,403 individuals, representing an average of 1.57% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common eider , <i>Somateria mollissima mollissima</i> , NW Europe	1109 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Bar-tailed godwit , <i>Limosa lapponica lapponica</i> , W Palearctic	16,546 individuals, representing an average of 13.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common shelduck , <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> , NW Europe	9,746 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Dark-bellied brent goose, <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i> ,	20,861 individuals, representing an average of 10.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Dunlin , <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i> , W Siberia/W Europe	36,600 individuals, representing an average of 2.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Pink-footed goose , <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> , Greenland, Iceland/UK	29,099 individuals, representing an average of 10.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

**Species/populations identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration under criterion 6.**

**Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:**

Black-tailed godwit , <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i> , Iceland/W Europe	6,849 individuals, representing an average of 14.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Ringed plover , <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> , Europe/Northwest Africa	1,500 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

European golden plover , <i>Pluvialis apricaria altifrons</i> Iceland & Faroes/E Atlantic	22,033 individuals, representing an average of 2.3% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern lapwing , <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> , Europe - breeding	46,422 individuals, representing an average of 2.3% 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	cobble, gravel, biogenic reef, neutral, shingle, sand, mud, clay, nutrient-rich, sedimentary, limestone
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Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, coastal, shingle bar, subtidal sediments (including sandbank/mudbank), intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), enclosed coast (including embayment), estuary, lagoon
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	circumneutral
Salinity	saline / euhaline
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Marham, 1971–2000) ( <a href="http://www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/marham.html">www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/marham.html</a> ) Max. daily temperature: 13.8° C Min. daily temperature: 5.7° C Days of air frost: 51.9 Rainfall: 621.3 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1536.6

**General description of the Physical Features:**

No information available

**15. Physical features of the catchment area:**

No information available

**16. Hydrological values:**

No special values known

**17. Wetland types**

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
J	Coastal brackish / saline lagoons	0.03
A	Shallow marine waters	51.7
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	0.03
G	Tidal flats	41
H	Salt marshes	7.2

**18. General ecological features:**

The intertidal flats of the Wash form one of the largest intertidal areas in Britain and these are predominantly sandy. The flats support high concentrations of marine worms and shellfish. There is an abundant growth of algae and high concentrations of marine invertebrates which provides a food source up to 300,000 wintering wildfowl, and supports an important fishery and seal colony. Extensive saltmarshes fringe the bay but much of the older and botanically more diverse saltmarsh has been lost due to a long history of land-claim. Higher level marshes are characterised by *Elytrigia atherica*, *Atriplex portulacoides*, *Suaeda maritima* and *Limonium vulgare*. Where the saltmarsh has been grazed by cattle and wildfowl, there may be extensive lawns of *Puccinellia* spp. Abundant *Aster tripolium* occurs at lower levels whilst *Salicornia* spp. and *Spartina anglica* are the principal colonising species.

**19. Noteworthy flora:****Nationally important species occurring on the site.**

Higher plants.  
*Salicornia* spp.

## 20. Noteworthy fauna:

### Birds

#### Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:

#### Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Common tern , *Sterna hirundo hirundo*, N & E Europe 152 pairs, representing an average of 1.4% of the GB population (Count as at 1993)

Lesser black-backed gull , *Larus fuscus graellsii*, W Europe/Mediterranean/W Africa 1378 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 1.2% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)

Little tern , *Sterna albifrons albifrons*, W Europe 33 pairs, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year mean 1992-1996)

#### Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Common greenshank , *Tringa nebularia*, Europe/W Africa 376 individuals, representing an average of 62.9% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Great cormorant , *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*, NW Europe 367 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Lesser black-backed gull , *Larus fuscus graellsii*, 1993 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Pied avocet , *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Europe/Northwest Africa 422 individuals, representing an average of 12.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Ruff , *Philomachus pugnax*, Europe/W Africa 25 individuals, representing an average of 3.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Whimbrel , *Numenius phaeopus*, Europe/Western Africa 191 individuals, representing an average of 6.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

#### Species with peak counts in winter:

Bean goose , *Anser fabalis fabalis*, NW Europe - wintering 7 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (Source period not collated)

Black (common) scoter , *Melanitta nigra nigra*, 1190 individuals, representing an average of 2.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Black-headed gull , *Larus ridibundus*, N & C Europe 31,403 individuals, representing an average of 1.57% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Common eider , *Somateria mollissima mollissima*, NW Europe 1109 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Greater white-fronted goose , *Anser albifrons albifrons*, NW Europe 100 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (Source period not collated)

Red-throated diver , *Gavia stellata*, NW Europe 55 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Spotted redshank , *Tringa erythropus*, Europe/W Africa 54 individuals, representing an average of 39.7% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

### Species Information

#### Species occurring at levels of international importance.

**Mammals.***Phoca vitulina***21. Social and cultural values:**

Current scientific research  
 Fisheries production  
 Livestock grazing  
 Non-consumptive recreation  
 Sport hunting  
 Transportation/navigation

**22. Land tenure/ownership:**

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

**23. Current land (including water) use:**

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	
Recreation	+	
Research	+	
Fishing: (unspecified)	+	
Fishing: commercial	+	+
Marine/saltwater aquaculture	+	
Gathering of shellfish	+	
Bait collection	+	
Arable agriculture (unspecified)		+
Permanent arable agriculture		+
Grazing (unspecified)	+	
Rough or shifting grazing	+	
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+
Harbour/port	+	+
Flood control	+	+
Irrigation (inc agricultural water supply)		+
Transport route	+	
Domestic water supply		+
Urban development		+
Non-urbanised settlements		+
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?
No factors reported	NA	(Potential: grazing, port, transport route, military activities)			

For category 2 factors only.

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

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	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Other	+	+
SAC	+	

**26. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

No information available

**27. Current scientific research and facilities:**

**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.

Bird Studies by the Wash Wader Ringing Group.

Waterfowl and invertebrate ecology studies by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

Seal population studies by the Sea Mammal Research Unit.

Annual monitoring of shellfish stocks by Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee.

### **Environment.**

Sediment types and distribution, processes, erosion, tides and currents have been studied by a variety of institutions and are expected to continue.

The shoreline and water quality is routinely monitored by the Environment Agency.

Land-Ocean Interaction Study by the Natural Environment Research Council (1992-98).

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### **28. Current conservation education:**

There are two field centres. Lincolnshire County Council run the Freiston field centre and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust run the Gibraltar Point Field Station.

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### **29. Current recreation and tourism:**

#### **Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.**

Land based recreation is chiefly limited to wildfowling, bird watching and walking along the sea banks around two-thirds of the site. The Peter Scott Walk between the outlets of the Rivers Nene and Great Ouse, has been promoted by the local authorities. Some access points to the shore have also been improved by local authorities. Snettisham Bird Reserve provides facilities for bird watching. Traditional beach recreational activities occur between Hunstanton and Snettisham.

Facilities for pleasure craft are limited to some mud berths and stage moorings on the tidal rivers and at the ports of Kings Lynn and Boston. The principal locations for sailing boats are found at the Skegness Yacht Club at Wainfleet and Snettisham Beach Sailing Club and Hunstanton.

Other water sports including windsurfing, water-skiing and power boats occur mainly at Hunstanton and Heacham on the Norfolk shore. Zoning of watercraft is managed by the local authority.

Recreational activities are subject to the Wash Estuary Management Plan but are not generally seen as detrimental to the site.

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### **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

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### **31. Management authority:**

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

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### **32. Bibliographical references:**

#### **Site-relevant references**

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