

79. Colne Estuary (Mid-Essex Coast, phase 2)

Geographical Coordinates:	51°48'N 1°01'E	Area:	2,701ha
Location:	About 10km south-east of the city of Colchester, in the county of Essex, south-east England. This site is a few kilometres east of the previously designated Ramsar sites, Abberton Reservoir and Blackwater Estuary (site number 87).		
Date of Ramsar Designation:	28 July 1994		
Other International Designations:	European Union Special Protection Area		
National Designations:	Sites of special scientific interest; Essex Coast Eutrophic Sensitive Area ^P ; Colne National Nature Reserve ^P (NNR); Essex Wildlife Trust reserve ^P .		

Principal Features: The Mid-Essex Coast comprises an extensive complex of estuaries and intertidal sand and siltflats, including several islands, shingle and shell beaches and extensive areas of saltmarsh. The Colne Estuary site supports a number of rare plants and animals. Twelve species of nationally scarce plants are present: *Bupleurum tenuissimum*, *Carex divisa*, *Frankenia laevis*, *Hordeum marinum*, *Inula crithmoides*, *Limonium binervosum*, *Salicornia perennis*, *S. pusilla*, *Spartina maritima*, *Suaeda vera*, *Zostera marina* and *Z. noltii*. The invertebrate fauna is particularly rich, reflecting the diversity of wetlands habitats, and includes at least 38 national Red Data Book species. The rarest of these include the endangered *Dyschirius extensus*, *Cloeophora fuscicornis* and *Ethmia terminella*. The site regularly supports over 20,000 waterfowl in winter. In the five-year period 1987/88 to 1991/92 the average peak count was 22,012 waders and 8,675 wildfowl. The Colne Estuary regularly supports, in winter, internationally important populations of two waterfowl species. During the same five-year period the following average peak counts were recorded: 5,315 *Branta bernicla bernicla* (3.1% of total world population) and 1,252 *Tringa totanus* (1.1% of the east Atlantic flyway pop.). Notable also are nationally important breeding populations of *Aythya ferina*, *Charadrius hiaticula* and *Sterna albifrons*; and nationally important wintering populations of *Phalacrocorax carbo*, *Cygnus olor*, *Tadorna tadorna*, *Bucephala clangula*, *Charadrius hiaticula*, *Pluvialis squatarola*, *Calidris alba*, *Calidris alpina*, *Limosa limosa* and *Numenius arquata*. (Criteria 2a,3a,3c).

Conservation Issues: The Mid-Essex Coast composite site is composed of five SSSIs: Colne Estuary, Blackwater Estuary, Dengie, Crouch Marshes and Foulness. Land tenure at the site is complex with national, local government, private, commercial and NGO interests. A range of land uses are recorded at the Colne Estuary site including shellfish gathering and bait collection, recreational and commercial fishing, pastoral agriculture, harbour facilities, transport route, sewage treatment and disposal, industry, tourism, recreational hunting, birdwatching and other recreation, and conservation. Preparation of an Estuary Management Plan for the Colne Estuary was scheduled to begin in the 1995/96 period. A Colne

NNR management plan is being implemented by English Nature. Parts of the site have been identified as part of a proposed European Union Special Area of Conservation.