

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

The Wash (Norfolk & Lincolnshire)

The Wash is numerically the most important area in Britain for wintering waterfowl, taking waders and wildfowl together. It is also the most important area in Britain in early autumn for moulting waders. The Wash is important also to certain wintering passerines, to breeding waders and terns, and to certain seabirds.

The Wash qualifies under Article 4(1) because it supports 30 breeding pairs of little terns *Sterna albifrons* (2% of the British population) and 220 pairs of common terns *Sterna hirundo* (2%); and because it supports 130 Bewick's swans *Cygnus cygnus* (3%) in winter.

The Wash qualifies under Article 4(2) as an internationally important wetland by supporting in winter an average of 163,000 waders and also 51,000 wildfowl; and because it supports on average the following internationally important numbers of individual species: 17,000 dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* (12% of the European wintering population), 7,300 pinkfooted geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* (7%), 16,000 shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* (12%), 1,700 pintails *Anas acuta* (2%), 24,000 oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* (3%), 5,500 grey plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* (7%), 500 sanderlings *Calidris alba* (3%), 7,500 knots *Calidris canutus* (21%), 29,000 dunlins *Calidris alpina* (1%), 8,200 bar-tailed godwits *Limosa lapponica* (1%), 3,700 curlews *Numenius arquata* (1%), 4,331 redshanks *Tringa totanus* (5%) and 980 turnstones *Arenaria interpres* (2%).

In addition the site qualifies because of its national importance to other migratory birds. Wintering birds include 3,900 wigeon *Anas penelope* (2% of the British wintering population), 220 goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (1%), 130 gadwall *Anas strepera* (3%), 830 common scoters *Melanitta nigra* (2%), 260 black-tailed godwits *Limosa limosa* (6%) and probably several gull species (*Larus*). Important populations of wintering passerines are also supported.

The salt-marshes support a diverse breeding bird population, including over 4,000 pairs of black-headed gulls *Larus ridibundus* (2%), shelducks and numerous wader species. Breeding redshanks occur at exceptionally high densities, and the breeding population of this species is undoubtedly of national importance although its exact size is still being assessed.