

EXE ESTUARY (DEVON)

The site qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting in winter about 200 avocets Recurvirostra avocetta (20% of the British wintering population) and 20 slavonian grebes Podiceps auritus (5% of British). Notable also are passage populations of up to 610 Sandwich terns Sterna sandvicensis, up to 400 common terns Sterna hirundo and up to 80 little terns Sterna albifrons, as well as regular small numbers of wintering red-throated diver Gavia stellata, black-throated diver Gavia arctica, great northern diver Gavia immer, merlin Falco columbarius, peregrine Falco peregrinus, golden plover Pluvialis apricaria, short-eared owl Asio flammeus, and breeding and wintering kingfisher Alcedo atthis.

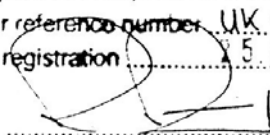
The site also qualifies under Article 4.2 as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting in winter over 20,000 waterfowl. In the five-year period 1985/86 to 1989/90 the average peak count was 20,600 waterfowl, comprising 6,100 wildfowl and 14,500 waders. The site supported internationally or nationally important wintering populations of the following migratory waterfowl (average peak counts for the five-winter period 1985/86 to 1989/90) : 2,650 dark-bellied brent geese Branta bernicla bernicla (2% of the total wintering population; 3% of British), 3,980 oystercatchers Haematopus ostralegus (1% of British), 350 grey plovers Pluvialis squatarola (2% of British), 5,300 dunlins Calidris alpina (1% of British) and 580 black-tailed godwits Limosa limosa (12% of British). Notable also are regular wintering populations of 2,220 wigeon Anas penelope, 90 red-breasted merganser Mergus serrator, 510 bar-tailed godwit Limosa lapponica, 690 curlew Numenius arquata and 630 redshank Tringa totanus.

In addition, the site supports, during migration, 440 ringed plovers Charadrius hiaticula (1% of the British passage population) and 50 greenshanks Tringa nebularia (12% of the British wintering population), as well as notable numbers of whimbrel Numenius phaeopus and turnstone Arenaria interpres.

During severe winter weather the site assumes even greater international importance as a cold weather refuge. Waterfowl from other areas concentrate here, attracted by the relatively mild climate and abundant food resources available.

As well as its importance for the individual species listed above, the site is also of strong scientific interest for its exceptionally diverse assemblage of wintering waterfowl. These occur at very high density on the site.

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