

EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds

Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Poole Harbour SPA

Counties/Unitary Authorities: Dorset County Council, Poole Borough Unitary Authority, Purbeck District Council

Boundary of the SPA:

The landward boundary of the SPA extends to Mean High Water (MHW) in many places but above MHW in areas supporting important wet grassland and saltmarsh habitats. To the north, it includes Holes Bay and Lytchett Bay. North of Lytchett Bay it incorporates the lower reaches of the Sherford River and an area of former freshwater wet grassland at French's Farm. To the west of the harbour, it encompasses the lower reaches of the River Frome as far as Wareham, including areas of wet grassland and saltmarsh either side of the river channels. To the south it includes a number of bays: Arne Bay, Middlebere and Wych Lake, Ower Bay, Newton Bay and Brand's Bay, where it incorporates saltmarsh above MHW and adjoins the Dorset Heathlands SPA. To the built up area in the east and north-east, the boundary generally follows the MHW mark.

The seaward boundary of the SPA extends to the harbour mouth, where it abuts the Solent & Dorset Coast pSPA. It incorporates all the intertidal and subtidal areas below Mean Low Water (MLW), including Little Sea, which is entirely surrounded by the Dorset Heathlands SPA.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 4157 ha.

Site description:

Poole Harbour SPA is located on the coast of East Dorset and is bounded by the conurbation of Poole on its northern and eastern shores, and by the Isle of Purbeck on its western and southern shores. Poole Harbour is a large natural harbour comprising of extensive tidal mudflats and saltmarshes together with associated reedbeds, freshwater marshes and wet grasslands. It also includes seagrass beds located towards the north east of the harbour and subtidal channels in which 68 seaweed species, 159 invertebrate species and 32 fish species have been recorded. The site is underpinned by parts of the following Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): Poole Harbour; Arne; Wareham Meadows; The Moors, Holton & Sandford Heaths; and Studland & Godlingston Heaths. It also overlaps with Poole Harbour Ramsar site.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **Article 4** of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) for the following reasons (summarised in Table 1):

- The site regularly supports more than 1% of the Great Britain populations of five species listed in Annex I of the EC Birds Directive. Therefore the site qualifies for SPA Classification in accordance with the UK SPA selection guidelines (stage 1.1).
- The site regularly supports more than 1% of the biogeographic population of two regularly occurring migratory species not listed in Annex I of the EC Birds Directive. Therefore the site qualifies for SPA Classification in accordance with the UK SPA selection guidelines (stage 1.2).

Table 1 Summary of qualifying ornithological interest species in Poole Harbour SPA

Feature	Count (period)	% of subspecies or population	Interest type
Common tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	178 pairs ¹ (356 breeding adults) 2010-2014	1.8 % of GB population ²	Annex 1
Sandwich tern <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	181 pairs ¹ (362 breeding adults) 2010-2014	1.6 % of GB population ²	Annex 1
Mediterranean gull <i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	64 pairs ³ (128 breeding adults) 2015	10% of GB population ²	Annex 1
Little egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	114 individuals ⁴ 2009/10-2013/14	2.5 % of GB population ⁵	Annex 1
Eurasian spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	20 individuals ⁴ 2009/10-2013/14	100% of the GB population ^{5,7}	Annex 1
Pied Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>	459 individuals ⁶ 1992/93 – 1996/97	36.1% of GB population ⁶	Annex 1
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	3,569 individuals ⁶ 1992/93 – 1996/97	1.2 % of biogeographic population ⁶	Regularly occurring migrant
Icelandic-race black-tailed godwit <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>	1,576 individuals ⁶ 1992/93 – 1996/97	2.3 % of biogeographic population ⁶	Regularly occurring migrant

¹ Data from: Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP)

² GB breeding populations derived from Musgrove *et al.* (2013)

³ Data from: David Chown (pers. comm.).

⁴ Data from: Wetlands Bird Survey database Holt *et al.* (2015)

⁵ GB non-breeding populations derived from Musgrove *et al.* (2013)

⁶ Data from: Poole Harbour SPA citation (March 2000)

⁷ GB non-breeding population (20 individuals) derived from Musgrove *et al.* (2013). This source has been used for consistency with that used for all other species, but given the recent growth of the GB population since 2004/05 – 2008/09, this estimate of 100% within Poole is clearly incorrect. Holt *et al.* (2015) give a maximum number of individuals counted in GB of 44. The Poole Harbour peak mean count of 20 equates to 45% of that figure.

Assemblage qualification:

The site qualifies under **Article 4** of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) as it used regularly by over 20,000 waterfowl (waterfowl as defined by the Ramsar Convention) or 20,000 seabirds in any season (Table 2).

Table 2 Summary of qualifying ornithological interest assemblage in Poole Harbour SPA

Feature	Count (period)
Overwintering waterbird Assemblage	25,176 individuals ¹ 1993/94-1996/7 for all species except new feature of little egret and Eurasian spoonbill for which five-year peak means from 2009/10 – 2013/14 (114 and 20 respectively) added to original overwintering assemblage total, minus little egret four-year peak mean (48) for 1993/94-1996/7 and spoonbill four-year peak mean (1) 1993/94-1996/7

¹ Derived by addition of the most recent five-year peak mean counts for the new features of little egret and Eurasian spoonbill (from WeBS database Holt *et al.* 2015) to the assemblage figure of 25,091 individuals used in the original Poole Harbour SPA citation in 2000 and based on count data collected between 1993/94 and 1996/97.

During the non-breeding season the area supports 25,176 individual waders and waterfowl including (in addition to the species which qualify as features in their own right (Table 1)): dunlin *Calidris alpina*, great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, dark-bellied brent goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*, teal *Anas crecca*, goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator*, curlew *Numenius arquata*, spotted redshank *Tringa erythropus*, greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, redshank *Tringa totanus*, pochard *Aythya farina* and black-headed gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, all of which are present in nationally important numbers.

Principal bird data sources:

Breeding bird features: tern colony counts from JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme contributed by colony managers: Dorset Wildlife Trust (Brownsea Island) and incidental counts of breeding gulls on saltmarsh islands in the Wareham Channel (David Chown, *in litt.*).

Non-breeding birds: Wetlands Bird Survey (WeBS) database (Holt *et al.* 2015) for most recent years' data, and original Poole Harbour SPA citation for historical figures, i.e. WeBS data 1992/93-1996/97.

References

Holt, C.A., Austin, G.E., Calbrade, N.A., Mellan, H.J., Hearn, R.D., Stroud, D.A., Wotton, S.R. and Musgrove, A.J. (2015) Waterbirds in the UK 2013/14: The Wetland Bird Survey. BTO/RSPB/JNCC. Theftford. <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs/publications/webs-annual-report>.

Musgrove, A., Aebischer, N., Eaton, M., Hearn, R., Newson, S., Noble, D., Parsons, M., Risely, K. and Stroud, D. (2013) Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. *British Birds*, 106: 64-100.