

**EU Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds:
Special Protection Area**

**SOMERSET LEVELS AND MOORS
(1003A)**

The Somerset Levels and Moors is the largest area of lowland wet grassland and associated wetland habitat remaining in Britain, covering about 35,000 hectares in the floodplains of the Rivers Axe, Brue, Parrett, Tone and their tributaries. The proposed SPA comprises a series of sites within the extensive area bounded by Bridgwater Bay in the west and the higher ground of the Mendips, Dorset Hills, Blackdown Hills, Brendons and Quantocks. The majority of the site is only a few metres above mean sea level and drains through a large network of ditches, rhynes and rivers. Flooding may affect large areas in winter to an extent that depends on levels of rainfall on the moors and surrounding higher ground, and on tidal conditions. The site is mainly given over to cattle grazing, often in conjunction with hay or silage production, although withy growing is also an important traditional activity. Parts of the site around Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath include areas of former raised peat bog, now substantially modified by agricultural improvement and peat extraction. The pSPA supports internationally important numbers of waterfowl in winter and is one of the most important sites in southern Britain for breeding waders associated with lowland wet grassland.

The pSPA covers 6,386.01 hectares and includes the following twelve Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981: Catcott, Edington & Chilton Moors, Curry & Hay Moors, King's Sedgemoor, Moorlinch, Shapwick Heath, Southlake Moor, Tealham & Tatham Moors, West Moor, West Sedgemoor, Westhay Heath, Westhay Moor and Wet Moor.

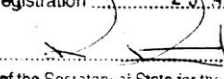
The Somerset Levels and Moors pSPA qualifies under Article 4.1 of the EU Birds Directive by regularly supporting nationally important numbers of wintering Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* and golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, both Annex 1 species. In the five year period 1989/90 to 1993/94 the site supported a peak mean of 310 Bewick's swan (4.4% of the British and 1.8% of the north-west European population) and 3,110 golden plover (1.2% of the British population).

The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting over 20,000 waterfowl in winter. The five year peak mean for the period 1989/90 to 1993/94 was 58,093 birds, comprising 41,442 waders and 16,651 wildfowl.

The site further qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting internationally important numbers of the migratory species teal *Anas crecca* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. In the five year period 1989/90 to 1993/94 the site supported a peak mean of 7,476 teal (5.3% of the British and 1.9% of the north-west European population) and 36,565 lapwing (exceeding 20,000 threshold for a wetland of international importance).

Notable also are nationally important numbers of the following species in winter (figures are five year peak means for the period 1989/90 to 1993/94): 94 gadwall *Anas strepera* (1.2% of British population), 5,927 wigeon *A. penelope* (2.1% of British population) and 217 shoveler *A. clypeata* (2.1% of British population). The site also supports an important assemblage of breeding and wintering birds in addition to the species mentioned above, including important populations of breeding waders associated with lowland wet grassland. The Annex 1 marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus* breeds and the Annex 1 species bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, peregrine *F. peregrinus*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* and short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* are regularly present in winter.

SPA Citation
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Signed 
on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment