

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

MID-ESSEX COAST

DENGIE

The Mid-Essex Coast comprises an extensive complex of estuaries and intertidal sand and silt flats, including several islands, shingle and shell beaches and extensive areas of saltmarsh. The proposed Special Protection Area follows the boundaries of five SSSIs: the Colne Estuary, the Blackwater Estuary, Dengie, the River Crouch Marshes and Foulness.

The Dengie qualifies under article 4.1 by regularly supporting a nationally important population of an Annex 1 species, the hen harrier (*Circus Cyaneus*) in winter. During the period 1987-1991 a mean of 19 birds (2% of the British total) occurred in the Mid-Essex Coast area. The Dengie is one of a number of sites used in the area.

The Dengie qualifies under Article 4.2 as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting, in winter, over 20,000 waterfowl. The Dengie had, in the five year period 1987/88 to 1991/92, an average peak count of 27,947 birds, comprising 3,146 wildfowl and 24,801 waders. The estuary regularly supports internationally important numbers of the following three species of migratory waterfowl in winter (average peak counts for the five year period 1987/88 to 1991/92): 2,250 dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* (1.3% of the total world population, 2.5% of the British wintering population); 1,752 grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (1% of East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) population, 8.2% of British); 7,763 knot *Calidris canutus* (2.2% of EAF, 3.4% of British).

Dengie also supports nationally important wintering populations of a further three species. Average peak counts over the five year period 1987/88 to 1991/92 were: 8,470 dunlin *Calidris alpina* (1.9% of British), 63 black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* (1.3% of British), 835 bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica* (1.3% of British).

During severe winter weather the Dengie (and the whole Mid-Essex Coast) can assume even greater national and international importance as wildfowl and waders from many other areas arrive, attracted by the relatively mild climate and the abundant food resources available in this SPA.

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