

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds: Citation for Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Ribble & Alt Estuaries

Unitary Authority/County: Lancashire; Sefton.

Site description: The Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA lies on the coast of Lancashire and Sefton in northwest England. The SPA encompasses all or parts of Ribble Estuary SSSI and Sefton Coast SSSI. It comprises two estuaries, of which the Ribble is by far the larger, together with an extensive area of sandy foreshore along the Sefton Coast, and forms part of the chain of west coast SPAs that fringe the Irish Sea. Indeed, there is considerable interchange in the movements of birds between this site and Morecambe Bay, Mersey Estuary, Dee Estuary and Martin Mere. A large proportion of the SPA is within the Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve. The site consists of extensive areas of sand and mudflats and, particularly in the Ribble, large areas of saltmarsh. There are also areas of coastal grazing marsh. The intertidal flats are rich in invertebrates on which waders and some wildfowl feed. The highest densities of feeding birds are on the muddier substrates of the Ribble, though sandy shores throughout are also used. Saltmarshes and coastal grazing marshes support high densities of wildfowl and these, together with intertidal sand and mudflats throughout, are used as high tide roosts. The site supports internationally important populations of waterbirds in winter, including swans, geese, ducks and waders. It is also of major importance during migration periods, especially for wader populations moving along the west coast of Britain. The larger expanses of saltmarsh and areas of coastal grazing marsh support breeding birds, including large concentrations of gulls and terns. These seabirds feed both offshore and inland, outside the SPA. Several species of waterfowl (notably Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*) utilise feeding areas on agricultural land outside the SPA boundary.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 12,412.31 ha.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **article 4.1** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of the following species listed in Annex I in any season:

Annex 1 species	Count and season	Period	% GB population
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	1 nest - breeding	Late 1980s count	9.1%
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	182 pairs - breeding	Count as at 1996	1.5%
Bewick's Swan <i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i>	276 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	3.9%
Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	182 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	3.3%
Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	3,598 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.4%
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	20,086 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	37.9%

The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the biogeographical populations of the following regularly occurring migratory species (other than those listed in Annex I) in any season:

Migratory species	Count and season	Period	% of population
Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus graellsii</i>	1,800 pairs - breeding	Count as at 1993	1.5% Western Europe/ Med/W Africa
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1,657 individuals - passage	5 year peak mean 1993 - 1997	3.3% Europe/ Northern Africa (win)
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	6,535 individuals - passage	5 year peak mean 1993 - 1997	6.5% E Atlantic/W&S Africa (win)
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	3,247 individuals - passage	5 year peak mean 1993 - 1997	2.2% Eastern Atlantic (wintering)
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	11,764 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	5.2% E Greenland/ Iceland/UK
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	4,925 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.6% Northwestern Europe
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	85,259 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	6.8% W Siberia & NW/NE Europe
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	7,157 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.8% Northwestern Europe
Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	2,731 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	4.6% Northwestern Europe
Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	18,535 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.1% Europe & N/W Africa (win)
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	9,355 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	6.2% Eastern Atlantic (wintering)
Knot <i>Calidris canutus islandica</i>	68,922 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	19.7% NE Can/Grl/ Iceland/NW Eur
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	2,882 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.9% E Atlantic/W&S Africa (win)
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>	39,376 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.8% N Siberia/Europe/ W Africa
Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>	1,273 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.8% Iceland (breeding)
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	2,505 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.7% Eastern Atlantic (wintering)

Assemblage qualification:

The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by over 20,000 waterbirds (waterbirds as defined by the Ramsar Convention) in any season:

In the non-breeding season, the area regularly supports 323,861 individual waterbirds (5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98), including Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Teal *Anas crecca*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Scaup *Aythya marila*, Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Knot *Calidris canutus islandica*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina alpina*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Redshank *Tringa totanus*.

The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by over 20,000 seabirds in any season:

In the breeding season, the area regularly supports 29,236 individual seabirds (count period ongoing), including Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus graellsii* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*.

Non-qualifying species of interest:

The following Annex 1 species occur in non-breeding numbers of less than European importance (less than 1% of the Great Britain population): Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*.

Status of SPA:

- 1) The Ribble Estuary SPA was classified on 31 August 1982.
- 2) The Alt Estuary SPA was classified on 28 November 1985.
- 3) The Ribble & Alt Estuaries SPA was classified on 16 February 1995, subsuming the Alt Estuary SPA and the Ribble Estuary SPA.
- 4) An extension to the Ribble & Alt Estuaries SPA, at the southern end of the Sefton Coast SSSI, was classified on 28 November 2002.