

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Fal and Helford
Unitary Authority/County:	Cornwall
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SW747261
SAC EU code:	UK0013112
Area (ha):	6387.80
Component SSSI:	Carricknath Point to Porthbean Beach SSSI, Gerrans Bay to Camel Cove SSSI, Lower Fal and Helford Intertidal SSSI, Malpas Estuary SSSI, Rosemullion SSSI, Upper Fal Estuary and Woods SSSI

Site description:

This site is a ria (drowned river valley) system that supports a wide range of communities representative of marine inlets and shallow bays. The rias of the Fal and Helford have only a low freshwater input and as a result the area contains a range of fully marine habitats from extremely sheltered in the estuarine inlets to the wave-exposed, tide-swept rocky shores of the open coast. There is a diverse algal flora and a number of warm-water species are present. It supports extensive and rich sediment communities, as well as rocky shores and subtidal rock and boulder communities. The site also contains a large, dispersed population of shore dock *Rumex rupestris*.

Subtidal sandbanks support rich invertebrate communities with eelgrass *Zostera marina* beds near the mouth of both the Fal and Helford and in some channels of the rias, such as the Percuil River and Passage Cove. Of particular importance are the maerl (*Phymatolithon calcareum* and *Lithothamnion corallioides*) beds that occur in the lower Fal on St Mawes Bank, and the extensive areas of maerl gravel which extend throughout the Carrick Roads and Falmouth Bay. These are the largest maerl beds in south-west Britain and harbour a rich variety of both epifaunal and infaunal species.

Sheltered intertidal mudflats and sandflats are particularly important for species living in the sediments, including amphipods, polychaete worms, burrowing sea urchins and bivalve molluscs. Most of the shores of the Fal and Helford rias, and their upper reaches, are fringed by sandflats and mudflats. Owing to the sheltered nature of the site, the sediments are stable as well as being diverse, and include muds, muddy sand and clean sand. These support particularly rich and nationally important sediment communities in the Fal/Ruan estuary, Percuil River and in Passage Cove, including beds of dwarf eelgrass *Zostera noltii* and diverse invertebrate communities. There is a narrow saltmarsh zonation typical of rias, from pioneer to upper marsh, and transitions to woodland where the fringing trees overhang the tidal river, an unusual juxtaposition of vegetation in the UK.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- Estuaries
- Large shallow inlets and bays
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide. (Intertidal mudflats and sandflats)
- Reefs
- Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time. (Subtidal sandbanks)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Shore dock *Rumex rupestris*

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0013112

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs