

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

Medway Estuary and Marshes (Kent)

The Medway Estuary and Marshes proposed Special Protection Area is a wetland of international importance comprising grazing marshes, inter-tidal flats and saltmarshes. The site provides breeding and wintering habitats for important assemblages of wetland bird species, particularly wildfowl and waders.

The boundaries of the proposed Special Protection Area are coincident with those of the Medway Estuary and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), apart from the exclusion of a section of inter-tidal mudflats in the west of the SSSI and other small areas of land in the north of the site at Abbey Court, Middle Stoke, and Grain. The proposed designation applies only to land above the Mean Low Water mark. The proposed Special Protection Area is an integral part of the larger Thames estuary and contributes to its overall regional significance for bird species, in a European context.

The Medway Estuary and Marshes qualifies under Article 4.1 of the EC Birds Directive by supporting, in summer, nationally important breeding populations of avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (28 pairs, 7% British breeding population) and little tern *Sterna albifrons* (24 pairs, 1% British breeding population) both Annex 1 species.

The site also qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting a nationally important wintering population of avocet. During the five year period 1986/87 to 1990/91, the average peak count was 70 birds, representing 7% of the British population.

The site also qualifies under Article 4.2 as a wetland of international importance by virtue of regularly supporting over 20,000 waterfowl, with an average peak count of 53,900 birds recorded in the five winter period 1986/87 to 1990/91. This total includes internationally or nationally important wintering populations of the following migratory waterfowl (figures given are average peak counts for the five winter period 1986/87 to 1990/91): 4,130 dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* (2.4% of the world population, 4.6% of the British wintering population), 5,900 shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (2.3% of the North West European population, 7.9% of British), 980 pintail *Anas acuta* (1.4% of the North West European wintering, 3.9% British), 740 ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (1.4% of the East Atlantic Flyway population, 3.2% of British), 4,810 grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (3.2% of EAF, 22.9% of British), 3,690 knot *Calidris canutus* (1.0% of EAF, 1.6% of British), 22,900 dunlin *Calidris alpina* (1.6% of the EAF, 5.3% of British), 4,180 redshank *Tringa totanus* (2.7% of the EAF, 5.5% of British), 250 great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (2.5% of British), 5,200 wigeon *Anas penelope* (2.0% of British), 2,400 teal *Anas crecca* (2.4% of British), 150 shoveler *Anas clypeata* (1.7% of British), 3300 oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (1.1% of British), 390 black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* (7.9% of British), 1,900 curlew *Numenius arquata* (2.1% of British), 17 spotted redshank *Tringa*

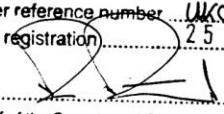
*erythropus* (8.5% of British), 12 greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (3.0% of British) and 630 turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (1.4% of British).

The site also qualifies under Article 4.2 by virtue of regularly supporting, in summer, a diverse assemblage of breeding migratory waterfowl including oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, redshank *Tringa totanus*, shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, teal *Anas penelope*, shoveler *Anas clypeata*, pochard *Aythya ferina* and common tern *Sterna hirundo*, the last an Annex 1 species. The site thus has an important role in maintaining the ranges of several species which have been affected by changes in their habitat elsewhere in Britain.

The site also qualifies under Article 4.2 by virtue of regularly supporting, in winter, a diverse assemblage of wintering species including red-throated diver, *Gavia stellata* great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, teal *Anas crecca*, shoveler *Anas clypeata*, pochard *Aythya ferina*, oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, and redshank *Tringa totanus*; and also the following Annex 1 species: Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*.

During severe winter weather elsewhere, the Medway Estuary and Marshes can assume even greater national and international importance as wildfowl and waders from many other areas arrive, attracted by the relatively mild climate, compared with continental European areas, and the abundant food resources available.

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