

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

AVON VALLEY - BICKTON TO CHRISTCHURCH (HAMPSHIRE & DORSET)

The proposed Avon Valley - Bickton to Christchurch Special Protection Area encompasses the lower reaches of the River Avon and its floodplain between Bickton and Christchurch. The site follows the boundaries of the Avon Valley SSSI, notified in 1993 (an amalgamation of three previously notified SSSIs, with extensions and deletions), except for the exclusion of several small blocks to the east of the river and a small area to the west of the river notified as SSSI on botanical grounds.

The Avon Valley shows a greater range of habitats and a more diverse flora and fauna than any other chalk river in Britain, and includes one of the largest expanses of unimproved floodplain grassland in Britain. The proposed Special Protection Area also includes a series of gravel pits known as Blashford Lakes.

The site supports a nationally important assemblage of breeding wetland birds and is especially important for breeding waders associated with lowland wet grassland. The floodplain grassland and the gravel pits provide feeding and roosting areas for nationally or internationally important populations of five species of wintering wildfowl.

The site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the EC Birds Directive by regularly supporting nationally important numbers of an Annex 1 species. In the five year period 1988/89 to 1992/93 an average of 156 Bewick's swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* were recorded on the site in winter, representing 2.2% of the British population.

The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive by regularly supporting an internationally important wintering population of gadwall *Anas strepera*, a migratory species. The five year peak mean for the period 1988/89 to 1992/93 was 418, representing 3.5% of the north-west European population and 8.4% of the British population. Notable also are nationally important wintering populations of the following migratory species: 170 European white-fronted geese *Anser albifrons albifrons*, representing 2.8% of the British population; 507 pochard *Aythya ferina*, representing 1% of the British population; 1,465 coot *Fulica atra*, representing 1.5% of the British population.

The site also supports a nationally important assemblage of breeding birds, associated with lowland open water and its margins. Species breeding regularly include great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, grey heron *Ardea cineria*, mute swan *Cygnus olor*, tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*, water rail *Rallus aquaticus*, little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*, common tern *Sterna hirundo*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Cetti's warbler *Cettia cettia*. The site includes one of the eight most important areas in Britain for breeding waders of lowland wet grassland, supporting high numbers of lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and redshank *Tringa totanus*.

SPA Citation

ICC

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment