

**EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna
and Flora
Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**

Name: Severn Estuary/ Môr Hafren

Unitary Authority/County: England: Bristol City, Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset, Somerset, South Gloucestershire.
Wales: Bro Morgannwg/Vale of Glamorgan, Caerdydd/Cardiff, Casnewydd/ Newport, Sir Fynwy/Monmouthshire.

SAC status: Designated on 10 December 2009

Grid reference: ST321748

SAC EU code: UK0013030

Area (ha): 73715.40

Component SSSI: **Upper Severn Estuary SSSI, Severn Estuary SSSI, Bridgwater Bay SSSI.**

Site description:

The Severn Estuary lies on the south west coast of Britain at the mouth of four major rivers (the Severn, Wye, Usk, and Avon). The immense tidal range (the second highest in the world) and classic funnel shape make the Severn Estuary unique in Britain and very rare worldwide. This tidal range creates strong tidal streams and high turbidity, producing communities characteristic of the extreme physical conditions of liquid mud and tide-swept sand and rocks.

The **Estuary** includes a wide diversity of habitats including **Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time, Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide, Atlantic salt meadows, and Reefs**, which are identified as Annex I habitat types in their own right.

The intertidal zone of mudflats, sand banks, rocky platforms and saltmarsh is one of the largest and most important in Britain. The estuary has a diverse geological setting and a wide range of geo-morphological features, especially sediment deposits. It is important for the interpretation of coastline dynamics and land-forms, and also past changes, in sea level, sediment supply, climate and river flow. The estuary's overall interest depends on its large size, and on the processes and interrelationships between the intertidal and marine habitats and its fauna.

The fluctuating salinity and highly mobile sediments with consequent high turbidity limits the benthic invertebrates of the mud and sandflats to relatively few species. Those which are tolerant of such conditions occur in very high densities on the more stable mudflats. Beds of eel-grass *Zostera* spp. also occur on some mudflats. A greater variety of invertebrates occurs on the intertidal rock platforms, a more stable habitat with rock pools and a relatively high cover of seaweeds.

The estuary fringes have large areas of saltmarsh. These are often grazed by sheep and/or cattle, a significant factor determining the plant communities. A range of saltmarsh types is present, with both gradual and stepped transitions between bare mudflat and upper marsh.

The estuarine fauna includes: invertebrate populations of importance (especially as a food resource for a wide range of bird and fish species), internationally important populations of waterfowl; and large populations of migratory fish, including **Sea lamprey** *Petromyzon marinus*, **River lamprey** *Lampetra fluviatilis* (both of which spawn in freshwater but complete part of their life cycle in the sea), **Twaite shad** *Alosa fallax* and the nationally rare and endangered Allis Shad *Alosa alosa*.

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:

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

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:

- Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)
- River Lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)
- Twaite Shad (*Alosa fallax*)

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.
Register reference number: UK0013030
Date of registration: 10 December 2009

Signed: *S G Hopkins*
On behalf of the Secretary of State for
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs