

## **EC Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds**

### Special Protection Area (SPA)

**Name:** *Outer Thames Estuary SPA*

**Counties/Unitary Authorities:** Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent

#### **Boundary of the SPA:**

The seaward and alongshore extent of the Outer Thames Estuary SPA is defined according to the distribution of non-breeding red-throated divers (O'Brien *et al.* 2012). The site includes coastal areas up to Mean High Water up the coast (to Caister-on-Sea) to provide coverage for little terns from Great Yarmouth North Denes foraging from this SPA, and common terns foraging from Breydon Water SPA. The inclusion of the River Yare channel, to abut the eastern boundary of the existing Breydon Water SPA, and the lower River Bure (to approximately Runham village south of Filby), to provide continuous SPA coverage for common terns foraging from this SPA. The inclusion of coastal areas up to Mean High Water down the coast (to just south of Corton), providing coverage for common terns from Breydon Water foraging from this SPA. The inclusion of the River Blyth to encompass Blythburgh Water, a tidal lagoon directly adjacent to the northern parts of Minsmere-Walberswick SPA in addition to the inclusion of Mean High Water areas up the coast (to Southwold) and down the coast (to Leiston) to provide continuous coverage for little terns foraging from this SPA. The inclusion of the estuarine areas up to Mean High Water within the Crouch and Roach Estuaries, overlapping the existing Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA in the intertidal area and the inclusion of a small marine area along the south Essex coast and overlapping part of the Foulness SPA for foraging common terns.

**Size of SPA:** The SPA covers an area of 392,451.66 ha.

#### **Site description:**

The Outer Thames Estuary SPA is located on the east coast of England between the counties of Norfolk (on the north side) and Kent (on the south side) and extends into the North Sea. The site comprises areas of shallow and deeper water, high tidal current streams and a range of mobile mud, sand, silt and gravely sediments extending into the marine environment, incorporating areas of sand banks often exposed at low tide. Intertidal mud and sand flats are found further towards the coast and within creeks and inlets inland down the Blyth estuary and the Crouch and Roach estuaries. The diversity of marine habitats and associated species is reflected in existing statutory protected area designations, some of which overlap or abut the SPA.

#### **Qualifying species:**

SPA site selection guidelines have been applied to the most up to date information for the site.

The site qualifies under **article 4.1** of the Directive (2009/147/EC) 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:

<b>Species</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Count (Period)</b>	<b>% of population</b>
Red-throated diver <i>Gavia stellata</i>	Non-breeding	6,466 individuals (1989 – 2006/07) <sup>1</sup>	38.0% of GB population
Little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Breeding	746 individuals (2011 – 2015)	19.64% of GB population
Common tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Breeding	532 individuals (2011 – 2015)	2.66% of GB population

**Assemblage qualification:**

The site does not qualify under SPA selection stage 1.3.

**Principal bird data sources:**

Colony counts from JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme, Norfolk Bird & Mammal Reports, Foulness Area Bird Survey Group and contributed by colony managers from RSPB.

Data on ringed common terns from national bird ringing scheme.

Red-throated diver data from aerial surveys 1989 - 2006/07: Natural England (2010): Departmental Brief: Outer Thames Estuary Special Protection Area. *Available at:* <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3233957>

Red-throated diver data from aerial surveys 1989 - 2006/07: O'Brien, S.H., Webb, A., Brewer, M. J. & Reid, J. B. (2012). Use of kernel density estimation and maximum curvature to set Marine Protected Area boundaries: Identifying a Special Protection Area for wintering red-throated divers in the UK. *Biological Conservation*, 156, 15–21.

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<sup>1</sup> Value retained from original Outer Thames Estuary SPA standard data form (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3233957>)