

Mid-Essex Coast

Foulness

The Mid-Essex Coast comprises an extensive complex of estuaries and intertidal sand and silt flats including several islands, shingle and shell beaches and extensive areas of saltmarsh. The proposed Special Protection Area follows the boundaries of five SSSIs: the Colne Estuary, the Blackwater Estuary, Dengie, the River Crouch Marshes and Foulness.

Foulness qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Birds Directive by supporting nationally important breeding populations of the following Annex 1 species (mean number within the Mid-Essex Coast area between 1987 and 1991): 26 pairs of avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (5% of the British breeding population), 267 pairs of sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis* (2% of British), 186 pairs of common tern *S. hirundo* (1% of British) and 73 pairs of little tern *S. albifrons* (3% of British). Foulness is one of several sites within the proposed SPA where these birds breed.

Foulness also qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting a nationally important wintering population of an Annex 1 species, the hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*. During the period 1987/88 to 1991/92 a mean of 19 birds (2% of the British total) occurred in the Mid-Essex Coast area. Foulness is one of a number of sites used in the area.

The estuary qualifies under Article 4.2 by supporting, in summer, nationally important breeding populations of a regularly occurring migratory species. Between 1987 and 1991 a mean of 135 pairs (1% of the British breeding population) of ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula* bred in the Mid-Essex Coast area. Foulness is one of a number of sites used.

Foulness also qualifies under Article 4.2 as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting, in winter, over 20,000 waterfowl. In the five-year period 1987/88 to 1991/92 the average peak count was 74,791 birds comprising 16,994 wildfowl and 57,797 waders. Foulness regularly supports, in winter, internationally important populations of the following six species of migratory waterfowl (average peak counts for the period 1987/88 to 1991/92): 13,276 dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* (7.8% of the total world population, 14.7% of British wintering population), 9,805 oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (1.1% of East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) population, 3.5% of British), 2,229 grey plover *Pluvialis squararola* (1.3% of EAF, 10.4% of British), 22,151 knot *Calidris canutus* (6.4% of EAF, 9.9% of British), 5,213 bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica* (4.5% of EAF, 8.5% of British) and 1,540 redshank *Tringa totanus* (1.4% of EAF, 2% of British).

Foulness also supports nationally important wintering populations of a further three species: 826 shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (1.1% of British), 9,420 dunlin *Calidris alpina* (2.1% of British) and 2,132 curlew *Numenius arquata* (2.3% of British).

During severe winter weather Foulness (and the whole Mid-Essex Coast) can assume even greater national and international importance as wildfowl and waders from many other areas arrive, attracted by the relatively mild climate and the abundant food resources available in this SPA.

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