

## CHESIL BEACH AND THE FLEET, DORSET

Chesil Beach is one of the five largest shingle beaches in Britain and is of international interest both as a rare habitat and as a unique physiographic feature. It is the largest shingle tombolo in the Country; comprising a simple, linear shingle storm beach linking the Isle of Portland to the mainland.

The shingle provides nesting habitat for up to 100 pairs of Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*) comprising c.5% of the British breeding population. It is also an important site for Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) (c. 65 pairs) and Ringed Plover (*Charadrius histicula*) (c. 50 pairs).

The small pebbled shingle in the west is well vegetated in parts and has a very rich flora; including local species like sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*), Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*), Sea Pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*), Shrubby Sea-blite (*Suaeda fruticosa*) and Rough Clover (*Trifolium scabrum*): plants that are characteristic of unstable shingle.

It is the only British locality for the Wingless Cricket (*Megoplites squamiger*).

The Fleet is the largest regularly-tidal lagoon in Britain; which with fresh-water stream inputs, gives rise to saline/brackish conditions. The bed of the Fleet shows unusual transitional habitats between the claybottom deposits and shingle substrate. The flora contains the most extensive mixed population of Eelgrasses (*Zostera* spp) in Britain, the very local Spiral Tasselweed (*Ruppia spiralis*), a rare stonewort (*Chara* sp) and diverse marine algal assemblages. "The section of the Fleet from the Narrows east to Small Mouth has a dominant marine influence with very rich communities including several species rarely recorded within the British Isles - notably the sponge, *Suberites massa* and goby *Gobius couchi* (both recorded in only two other localities in Britain), the burrowing anemone, *Scalanthus callimorphus* (type locality in Portland Harbour and recorded on West coast of Ireland) and the polychaete *Sabella flabellata*."

The Fleet is notable for the diversity of waders and wildfowl in winter. In particular it regularly supports at least 1% of the north-west European population of Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) with up to 7,000 birds being recorded in recent years. Good numbers of Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), Teal (*Anas crecca*), Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) and Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) are also present.

The site supports the largest resident Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) population in Britain (1000 + birds) which predominantly graze the *Zostera* beds. Some 30-40 pairs breed.

In recent years, Dark-bellied Brent Geese (*Branta bernicula*) have begun to over-winter.

This citation / map relates to a site entered in  
the Register of European sites for Great Britain.  
Register reference number UK001009  
Date of registration ..... 30 JAN 1996 .....

Signed B. J. Cole  
on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment