

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

Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Hamford Water

Counties/Unitary Authorities: Essex County Council

Size of SPA: The area of the SPA is 3,532.56 ha.

Site description: Hamford Water SPA is located on the north Essex coast, between the towns of Walton-on-the-Naze and Dovercourt. The site is a large shallow estuarine basin comprising tidal creeks, intertidal mud, sand flats and saltmarshes, as well as areas of scrub and unimproved grassland to the landward side of the sea walls.

Several islands are located within the basin, including Horsey Island, Skipper's Island, Hedge-End Island and Garnham's Island. All of these islands have substantial areas of saltmarsh on their margins and within their seawalls, where the seawall has breached, providing important feeding and roosting areas for many of the site's qualifying waterbirds.

Little terns nest on sand and shingle to the north eastern corner of Horsey Island. The grass fields within the sea wall at Horsey Island are utilised by both wintering and breeding waders and wildfowl. The rough grassland habitat at Skipper's Island supports the largest UK population of the rare Fisher's Estuarine Moth (*Gortyna borelii lunata*) and large stands of its larval food plant, Hog's Fennel (*Peucedanum officinale*). This moth is also found in localised areas along the sea wall on the mainland and on several other islands, including Horsey and Hedge-End.

Extensive intertidal mudflats provide an abundant food resource for wintering waterbirds and areas of seagrass are exploited by large flocks of brent geese on their autumn arrival. Ducks, grebes and cormorants feed within the sub-tidal waters and little terns are frequently recorded foraging in the shallower water, along the edges and mouths of creeks and channels. There are shingle spits along the coastline between Pewit Island and Dovercourt and between Walton-on-the-Naze and Stone Point. Ringed plover use these areas for nesting. The shingle habitat is topped in places by low, retreating sand dunes and supports several uncommon plants including Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*) and Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*).

The marine area includes all sub-tidal habitats out to 1,776 m, as well as areas of inter-tidal sandbank (Pye Sands) in the Pennyhole Bay area and an area of intertidal beach below the cliffs at The Naze.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **Article 4.1** and **4.2** of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) for the following reasons:

Species	Count (period)	% of subspecies or population	Interest type
Qualifying features with revised counts			
Little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i>	39 pairs – breeding (78 breeding adults) 2010 – 2014	2.1% of GB population	Annex 1
Qualifying features with counts remaining as at 1993 classification			
Avocet	99 individuals – wintering	7% of GB population	Annex 1

Species	Count (period)	% of subspecies or population	Interest type
<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	1986/87 – 1990/91		
Dark bellied brent goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>	5,650 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	2% of biogeographic population	Migratory
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	840 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	1% of GB population ¹	Migratory
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	3,630 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	2% of GB population ¹	Migratory
Ringed plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	620 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	1% of biogeographic population	Migratory
Grey plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	1,080 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	2% of GB population ¹	Migratory
Black-tailed godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i>	1,580 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	2% of biogeographic population	Migratory
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	1,240 individuals – wintering 1986/87 – 1990/91	1% of biogeographic population	Migratory

¹ Data from: Hamford Water 1993 SPA citation. In those cases in which % values are expressed in terms of %GB for non-Annex 1 species, no figure, expressed in terms of % of biogeographical population, was given in the original citation.

Principal bird data sources:

Breeding bird features:

- 2010-2013 data: Hamford Water little tern colony counts from JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme contributed by colony managers.
- 2014 data: consultant surveyor, results of which are presented in Gibson, M. (2014): Breeding little tern and ringed plover – Hamford Water SSSI 2014. Unpublished report produced for Natural England: September 2014.

Non-breeding bird features:

- Original Hamford Water SPA citation for historical figures i.e. WeBS data 1986/87 – 1990/91. Available from:
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6658670226046976>

GB population estimates:

- From: Musgrove, M., Aebischer, N., Eaton, M., Hearn, R., Newson, S., Noble, D., Parsons M., Risely K., & Stroud, D. 2013 Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. British Birds 106: 64–100