

## EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds Special Protection Area (SPA)

**Name:** Mersey Estuary

**Unitary Authority/County:** Cheshire; Halton; Liverpool; and Wirral.

**Site description:** The Mersey Estuary is on the Irish Sea coast of north-west England. The SPA encompasses all or parts of Mersey Estuary SSSI and New Ferry SSSI. It is a large, sheltered estuary which comprises large areas of saltmarsh and extensive intertidal sand and mudflats, with limited areas of brackish marsh, rocky shoreline and boulder clay cliffs, within a rural and industrial environment. The intertidal flats and saltmarshes provide feeding and roosting sites for large and internationally important populations of waterfowl. During the winter, the site is of major importance for duck and waders. The site is also important during spring and autumn migration periods, particularly for wader populations moving along the west coast of Britain.

**Size of SPA:** The SPA covers an area of 5,023.35 ha.

### Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **article 4.1** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) 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:

Annex 1 species	Count and season	Period	% of GB population
Golden plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	3,040 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.2%

The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the biogeographical populations of the following regularly occurring migratory species (other than those listed in Annex I) in any season:

Migratory species	Count and season	Period	% of subspecies/population
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	4,513 individuals - passage	5 year peak mean 1993 - 1997	3.5% <i>britannica</i>
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	6,476 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.2% Northwestern Europe (breeding)
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	11,723 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.9% Northwestern Europe (non-breeding)
Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	1,169 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	1.9% Northwestern Europe (non-breeding)
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>	48,789 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	3.7% <i>alpina</i> , Western Europe (non-breeding)
Black-tailed godwit <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>	976 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	2.8% <i>islandica</i>
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	4,993 individuals - wintering	5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98	3.8% <i>britannica</i>

Bird counts from: Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) database.

**Assemblage qualification:**

The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by over 20,000 waterbirds (waterbirds as defined by the Ramsar Convention) in any season:

In the non-breeding season, the area regularly supports 104,599 individual waterbirds (5 year peak mean 1993/94 - 1997/98), including great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, teal *Anas crecca*, pintail *Anas acuta*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, dunlin *Calidris alpina alpina*, black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*, curlew *Numenius arquata* and redshank *Tringa totanus*.

**Non-qualifying species of interest:** Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica* and short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* (all Annex I species) occur in non-breeding numbers of less than European importance (less than 1% of the GB population).

**Status of SPA:**

- 1) The Mersey Estuary was classified as a Special Protection Area on 20 December 1995.
- 2) An extension to the Mersey Estuary SPA, to include New Ferry SSSI, was classified on 23 June 2004.