

COUNTY: LANCASHIRE & MERSEYSIDE

SITE NAME: RIBBLE ESTUARY

DISTRICT: FYLDE, SEFTON METROPOLITAN, SOUTH RIBBLE AND WEST LANCASHIRE

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Includes the Ribble Marshes National Nature Reserve declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: Fylde Borough Council, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, South Ribble Borough Council, West Lancashire Borough Council.

National Grid Reference: SD 375240

Area: 9226.3 (ha.) 22798.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 102, 108
33, 42

1:25,000: SD 21, 22, 23, 31, 32,

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –
1966 (Southport Sanctuary)
1976 (Ribble Estuary)

Date of Last Revision: 1979

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: 1984

Other Information:

1. Listed as an internationally important coastal site in 'A Nature Conservation Review' ed. D A Ratcliffe (1977) Cambridge University Press.

2. 2,916 ha. of the foreshore west of the National Nature Reserve are covered by the Southport Sanctuary, a National Wildfowl Refuge made a statutory bird sanctuary by the Wild Birds (Southport Sanctuary) Order 1956 under the Protection of Birds Act 1954. By virtue of the Interpretation Act 1978 the Order remains in force.

3. 6,730.0 ha. of the SSSI are in Lancashire and 2,501.6 ha. are in Merseyside.

4. The area of the National Nature Reserve is 2302 ha.

5. The boundary of the SSSI has been modified by a number of deletions and one extension.

6. The site is adjacent to the Southport Sand Dunes and Foreshore SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Ribble Estuary is situated on the Lancashire coast west of Preston between Southport and Lytham St. Annes extending inland to Longton. It has extensive intertidal sand-silt flats with one of the largest areas of grazed greenmarsh in Britain and includes small areas of recently reclaimed saltmarsh. The estuary is of international importance for the passage and wintering waterfowl it supports, being a major link in the chain of estuaries down the west coast of Britain used by birds on migration between the breeding grounds in the far north and their wintering grounds further south. The Ribble Marshes National Nature Reserve is located in the centre of the SSSI and most of the foreshore in Sefton outside the NNR is covered by the Southport Sanctuary which provides a protected low tide roost for pinkfooted geese.

The mudflats are rich in invertebrates on which the waders and many of the wildfowl, especially shelduck, feed and the sandbanks also provide low tide roosting sites for pinkfooted geese. The saltmarshes consist mainly of saltmarsh grass/red fescue sward with a belt of cord-grass (*Spartina*) at the seaward edge. They provide roosting sites for the waders at high tide and support large numbers of wildfowl such as mallard, teal, wigeon and pink-footed geese.

The estuary supports internationally important numbers of the following waterfowl: Bewick's swan, pink-footed goose, shelduck, wigeon, oystercatcher, knot, sanderling, dunlin, black-tailed and bar-tailed godwit as well as smaller populations of lapwing, curlew, grey plover and golden plover. The total numbers of waterfowl are also of international importance. Wildfowl numbers regularly exceed the criterion of 10,000. During the period 1977–82 the peak counts of waders greatly exceeded the criterion of 20,000, being always in excess of 56,000 with a maximum of 86,000, keeping the Ribble in the top seven estuaries in Britain for waders. The breeding bird communities of the saltmarsh are also significant and include nationally important breeding populations of black-headed gull, common tern and redshank.

Enclosed by the Coastal Road is an area of reclaimed unimproved grazing marsh, an uncommon habitat in NW England. This still supports a variety of saltmarsh plants in the more brackish parts nearer the sea and along the creeks. Plants such as cord-grass, thrift, sea aster and the brackish water crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*), a particularly scarce plant in NW England, occur here. These areas are important as a major high tide roost for waterfowl, especially redshank, grey plover, black-tailed godwit, dunlin, oystercatcher, Bewick's swan and wigeon. They also support a diverse breeding bird community which includes skylark, lapwing, teal, shoveler, ringed plover and snipe.