

**County:** Devon      **Site Name:** Erme Estuary

**District:** South Hams

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

**Local Planning Authority:** Devon County Council, South Hams District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SX 623490      **Area:** 431.4 (ha) 1,065.9 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 202      **1:10,000:** SX 54 NE, 64 NW, 65 SW

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1976      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1986      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

The site lies within South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.  
The site boundary has been extended.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

This small secluded estuary, located on the South Devon coast, contains fine examples of estuarine, saltmarsh, freshwater and oak-hazel woodland habitats. It supports an important breeding bird community and, additionally, provides feeding and roosting grounds for waterfowl on passage and in winter.

The Erme Estuary is about 5 km in length. At its mouth it is characterised by extensive sandflats locally colonised by seaweeds such as flatwrack *Fucus spiralis* and *Enteromorpha* sp., with an often steep and rugged shoreline. Upstream, mudflats predominate, which support areas of saltmarsh dominated by common cord-grass *Spartina anglica*, with sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, sea aster *Aster tripolium* and glasswort *Salicornia* spp. At the head of the estuary, the saltmarsh grades into a succession of wet meadows lying beside the River Erme. These are subject to varying degrees of flooding and salinity and support areas of soft rush *Juncus effusus* and common reed *Phragmites australis*. A number of artificial fish ponds and other freshwater pools occur. These have become partially silted up and carry fringing belts of reedswamp and support a wide variety of freshwater flora and fauna.

The slopes above the estuary are formed of Lower Devonian slates and grits and are extensively wooded. Orcheton Wood is a fine example being dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and having an understorey characterised by the abundance of hazel *Corylus avellana* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and great woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* dominate the ground flora which is very diverse and contains such plants as columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* and butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus*.

The site as a whole supports a diverse breeding bird community which includes heron *Ardea cinerea*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and cirl bunting *Emberiza cirlus*. It also provides feeding and roosting grounds for wildfowl and waders on passage and during winter. The estuary and the River Erme is a spawning run for sea trout *Salmo trutta*, and is frequented by European otter *Lutra lutra*.