



## **Teesmouth Landscape Area Habitats & Species**

### **UK BAP Priority Habitats**

#### **Mudflat**

Teesmouth includes, at Seal Sands within the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve, one of the largest areas of intertidal mudflats on England's north-east coast. These mudflats are an important feeding ground for wading birds, including redshank and dunlin, and also important for harbour seal. Mudflats are also found along the tidal stretches of the River Tees and Greatham Creek.

#### **Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh**

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh covers large tracts of the land east of Billingham and includes extensive areas at Saltholme, Cowpen Marsh and Greenabella Marsh. There is an additional area at Seaton Common and one site south of the river, at Coatham Marsh. Some parts of these areas are included in SSSI, Ramsar and Special Protection Area designations.

#### **Coastal Sand Dune**

Coastal Sand Dune occurs on both sides of the River Tees estuary, at North Gare/Seaton Dunes and South Gare/Coatham Sands. The majority of the dunes are covered by a SSSI designation, and Ramsar and Special Protection Area designations also cover approximately half of the dunes.

#### **Saline Lagoon**

There are two saline lagoon sites within the Teesmouth Landscape Area, one at the point at which Greatham Creek meets Seal Sands and one within the RSPB Reserve at Saltholme, the latter being covered by SSSI, Ramsar and Special Protection Area designations. The aquatic invertebrates occurring in the shallows of these saline lagoons form an important part of the diet of the avocet, and other important water bird species which are associated with this habitat.

#### **Saltmarsh**

The largest area of saltmarsh between Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve to the north and the Humber Estuary to the south is found on Greatham Creek. Other small areas of relic saltmarsh are found within some industrial sites and along the tidal stretches of the River Tees.

#### **Open Mosaic Habitat on Previously Developed Land (Brownfield)**

There are 27 open mosaic habitat sites in the Teesmouth Landscape Area. These are distributed mainly within the Boroughs of Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland, being centred upon areas which were formerly subject to land reclamation.

Many locations have limited public access due to being part of operational industrial sites. The majority of sites consist of open mosaic grassland, often with a small amount of scrub, but also sometimes containing small areas of other specialised habitats, including reedbed, dune grassland (Bran Sands area) and saltmarsh (Brinefields). Important species found within these sites include grey partridge, skylark, brown hare, purple milk-vetch and a number of nationally notable moth species.

### **Reedbed**

Areas of reedbed are found at Seaton Common, Coatham Sands, Cowpen Marsh and within the RSPB Reserve at Saltholme. The majority of these reedbeds are covered by SSSI designations.

### **Fen**

There is one cluster of fen in the Teesmouth Landscape Area, within the RSPB Reserve at Saltholme, some of which is covered by SSSI, Ramsar and Special Protection Area designations.

### **Priority Ponds**

There are three clusters of priority ponds in the Teesmouth Landscape Area, one within the RSPB Reserve at Saltholme, one around Greatham Creek, and one in the Coatham Marsh area. The majority of the ponds meet the priority pond criteria due to the presence of common toad, with many of the ponds within Saltholme meeting the criteria for water vole. There are also a few designated for saline lagoon, a few for great crested newt, three for invertebrates, one for otter, and one for flat-sedge.

### **Sites of Geological Importance**

There is one site, Redcar Rocks, which is the best exposure of rocks belonging to the oldest part of the Jurassic succession in the north-east of England, displaying part of the succession that is missing further along the coast in North Yorkshire. The site is covered by a SSSI designation.

### **UK BAP Priority species**

#### **Water Vole**

Water voles are present at the RSPB Reserve at Saltholme and have also been recorded at Greenabella Marsh.

#### **Great Crested Newt**

There is a cluster of great crested newt records at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park and they are also recorded as present within several open mosaic habitat sites north of Greatham Creek.

#### **Common Lizard**

Populations of common lizard are found south of the river on the South Gare dunes. North of the river the coastal population appears to extend into some of the industrial sites but there are doubts as to whether this is a naturally occurring population or an introduction.

### **Harbour or Common Seal**

There is a breeding population of 70–80 harbour seal in the Tees estuary, which is the largest known population along the coastline from the River Tees north to the River Tweed. The seal population is focused upon Seal Sands but animals also haul out on Greatham Creek at high tide and are seen on the tidal stretches of Billingham Beck and as far up the River Tees as the Barrage.

### **Otters**

Otters are regularly recorded around the North Tees Marshes from Saltholme to Greatham Creek and have been reported in Seaton Channel and at the mouth of the River Tees. They are also found on the lower reaches of Billingham Beck and Claxton Beck.

### **Brown Hare**

Brown hare is found in good numbers around the industrial sites and grazing marsh areas of Teesmouth.

### **Purple Milk-vetch**

An extensive population of purple milk-vetch occurs on the sand dunes of South Gare with smaller populations on the dune slacks at North Gare. There are also scattered plants at Coatham and the sea wall on Greenabella.

### **Non-breeding Birds (overwintering and passage)**

Teesmouth Landscape Area encompasses the 'Teesmouth Flats and Marshes' (a complex of sites listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe (1977)) which are protected through European and International designations because of their importance for non-breeding populations of red knot, common redshank and sandwich tern, and their assemblages of waterfowl of international importance with peak counts in winter. Other important overwintering birds are mistle thrush and woodcock.

### **Breeding Birds**

A large percentage of many breeding populations of bird species of key importance in the Tees Valley are present within the Teesmouth Landscape Area. Eight species are listed as of red level of concern in the UK (for example lapwing, grasshopper warbler, reed bunting and skylark) and 18 species listed as of amber concern in the UK (for example little tern, snipe, little grebe and whitethroat). Nine out of this total of 26 species are also UKBAP priority species.

The Teesmouth area is one of the top five sites in the UK for breeding common tern.

### **Invertebrates**

Open mosaic habitat with a high botanical species diversity is important for many specialised invertebrate species including the dingy skipper and grayling butterflies which have some of their most significant regional populations on the Teesmouth industrial sites. The presence of sizeable populations of these two species on a single site indicates that there are likely to be important invertebrate communities present. Dingy skipper has small populations scattered across locations on both sides of the estuary, while grayling has its largest populations on industrial sites in the Redcar and North Tees areas.

There are also assemblages of nationally notable moth species occurring on the saltmarsh in the Greatham Creek area; in the reedbeds of the North Tees area and on the dune grasslands at Bran Sands. A number of these species are also listed as species of conservation priority in the Tees Valley.