

88. Severn Estuary¹

Geographical Coordinates: 51°33'N 2°45'W **Area:** 20,513ha

Location: The very large coastal inlet separating southeast Wales from southwest England. The cities of Bristol and Cardiff are situated adjacent, or close, to the estuary, which lies in the counties of Gloucestershire, Avon and Somerset (England) and Gwent and South Glamorgan (Wales).

Date of Ramsar Designation: 13 July 1995

Other International Designations: European Union Special Protection Area

National Designations: Site of special scientific interest

Principal Features: The Severn Estuary is one of the largest estuaries in Britain and it has the second largest tidal range in the world. Its classic funnel shape and southwest orientation makes it susceptible to extreme weather conditions in the east Atlantic. There are large urban developments on the estuary. The high tidal range leads to strong tidal stream and high turbidity, producing communities characteristic of the extreme physical conditions of liquid mud and tide-swept sand and rock. The site is particularly important for the run of migratory fish between the sea and rivers via the estuary. Species using the estuary include *Salmo salar*, *S. trutta*, *Petromyson marinus*, *Lampreta fluviatilis*, *Alosa alosa*, *A. fallax* and *Anguilla anguilla*. The estuary is also important for migratory birds during spring and autumn migrations. During the five year period 1987/88 to 1991/92 the estuary supported nationally important numbers of *Charadrius hiaticula*, *Calidris alpina*, *Numenius phaeopus*, and *Tringa totanus*. The site also regularly supports more than 20,000 waterfowl. In the five year period 1988/89 to 1992/93 the average peak count was 68,026 waterfowl, comprising 17,502 wildfowl and 50,524 waders. These included internationally important numbers of *Anser albifrons albifrons* (3,002), *Tadorna tadorna* (2,892), *Anas strepera* (330), *Calidris alpina* (41,683) and *Tringa totanus* (2,013). Several other species occur in nationally important numbers. (Criteria 1a,2b,2c,3a,3c).

Conservation Issues: Land uses at the site include habitat/nature conservation, bait collecting, recreational and sport hunting, recreational, sport and commercial fishing, permanent pastoral agriculture, grazing, birdwatching, boating, swimming, sewage treatment, industrial water supply, flood control, sand/gravel extraction, harbour use, military activities, industry and transport. A project officer has been appointed to prepare a management strategy. A management plan for the Severn Estuary is expected to be completed by 1997. The intention is to link this with the National Rivers Authority Catchment Management Plan. The area is also covered by a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food funded Shoreline Management Plan.

