

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

*Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).*

## Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

---

## 1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

### Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Monkstone House

City Road

Peterborough

Cambridgeshire PE1 1JY

UK

Telephone/Fax: +44 (0)1733 – 562 626 / +44 (0)1733 – 555 948

Email: [RIS@JNCC.gov.uk](mailto:RIS@JNCC.gov.uk)

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY.

DD MM YY

--	--	--

Designation date

--	--	--	--	--	--

Site Reference Number

---

## 2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 05 January 1976

---

## 3. Country:

UK (England)

---

## 4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Ouse Washes

---

## 5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

**This RIS is for:** Updated information on an existing Ramsar site

---

## 6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

### a) Site boundary and area:

\*\* Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

### b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

**7. Map of site included:**

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) *Yes*
- iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) **Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:**

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

**8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):**

52 28 34 N                      00 12 19 E

**9. General location:**

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Nearest town/city: Ely

The site lies in the counties of Cambridgeshire and west Norfolk. It extends for 36 km south-west of Downham Market to Erith.

**Administrative region:** Norfolk

**10. Elevation** (average and/or max. & min.) (metres):    **11. Area** (hectares): 2469.08

Min.	0
Max.	5
Mean	2

**12. General overview of the site:**

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

This site is an area of seasonally-flooded washland habitat managed in a traditional agricultural manner. The washlands support nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl and nationally important numbers of breeding waterfowl. The site is also of note for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland communities which it holds, and for the richness of the aquatic flora within the associated watercourses.

**13. Ramsar Criteria:**

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

**1, 2, 5, 6**

**14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:**

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 1

The site is one of the most extensive areas of seasonally-flooding washland of its type in Britain.

Ramsar criterion 2

The site supports several nationally scarce plants, including small water pepper *Polygonum minus*, whorled water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum*, greater water parsnip *Sium latifolium*, river water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, fringed water-lily *Nymphoides peltata*, long-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton praelongus*, hair-like pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*, grass-wrack pondweed *Potamogeton compressus*, tasteless water-pepper *Polygonum mite* and marsh dock *Rumex palustris*.

Invertebrate records indicate that the site holds relict fenland fauna, including the British Red Data Book species large darter dragonfly *Libellula fulva* and the rifle beetle *Oulimnius major*.

The site also supports a diverse assemblage of nationally rare breeding waterfowl associated with seasonally-flooding wet grassland.

Ramsar criterion 5

**Assemblages of international importance:**

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

59133 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

**Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.**

**Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):**

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

Tundra swan , <i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i> , NW Europe	1140 individuals, representing an average of 3.9% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Whooper swan , <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> , Iceland/UK/Ireland	653 individuals, representing an average of 3.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian wigeon , <i>Anas penelope</i> , NW Europe	22630 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Gadwall , <i>Anas strepera strepera</i> , NW Europe	438 individuals, representing an average of 2.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian teal , <i>Anas crecca</i> , NW Europe	3384 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern pintail , <i>Anas acuta</i> , NW Europe	2108 individuals, representing an average of 3.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , NW & C Europe	627 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

**Species/populations identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration under criterion 6.**

**Species with peak counts in winter:**

Mute swan , <i>Cygnus olor</i> , Britain	722 individuals, representing an average of 1.9% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common pochard , <i>Aythya ferina</i> , NE & NW	4678 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the population (5 year peak mean

Europe 1998/9-2002/3)

Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*, 2647 individuals, representing an average of  
Iceland/W Europe 7.5% of the population (5 year peak mean  
1998/9-2002/3)

Contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which is updated annually. See [www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm](http://www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm).  
Details of bird species occurring at levels of National importance are given in Section 22

**15. Biogeography** (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

**a) biogeographic region:**

Atlantic

**b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme** (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

**16. Physical features of the site:**

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	acidic, basic, neutral, alluvium, peat
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, floodplain
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	circumneutral
Salinity	fresh
Soil	mainly organic
Water permanence	usually seasonal / intermittent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Cambridge, 1971–2000) ( <a href="http://www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/cambridge.html">www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/cambridge.html</a> ) Max. daily temperature: 14.1° C Min. daily temperature: 6.1° C Days of air frost: 41.9 Rainfall: 553.5 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1501.2

**General description of the Physical Features:**

The Ouse Washes is an extensive area of seasonally-flooding wet grassland ('washland') lying between the Old and New Bedford Rivers, and acts as a floodwater storage system during winter months.

**17. Physical features of the catchment area:**

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

The Ouse Washes is an extensive area of seasonally-flooding wet grassland ('washland') lying between the Old and New Bedford Rivers, and acts as a floodwater storage system during winter months.

**18. Hydrological values:**

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

Flood water storage / desynchronisation of flood peaks

**19. Wetland types:**

Human-made wetland, Inland wetland

Code	Name	% Area
4	Seasonally flooded agricultural land	87.3
9	Canals and drainage channels	7
M	Rivers / streams / creeks: permanent	4
2	Farm ponds, small tanks	1.7

**20. General ecological features:**

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

The site is one of the country's few remaining areas of extensive washland habitat. It is notable for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland it holds. The grassland communities are characterised by such species as reed and floating sweet grass *Glyceria maxima* and *G. fluitans*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus* together with a variety of sedges and rushes. Typical herbs include amphibious bistort *Persicaria amphibia*, water pepper *P. hydro Piper*, and tubular water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*. The associated dykes and rivers hold a great variety of aquatic plants, the pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp. are particularly well represented. Other aquatic species include the fringed water lily *Nymphoides peltata*, greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and the four species of duckweeds *Lemna* spp. The Old Bedford River and River Delph are good examples of base-rich, slow-flowing lowland rivers. The flora includes the fan-leaved water crowfoot *Ranunculus circinatus*, yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* and river water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*.

Ecosystem services

**21. Noteworthy flora:**

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.

**Nationally important species occurring on the site.****Higher Plants.**

*Lactuca saligna*, *Alisma gramineum*, *Sium latifolium*, *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, *Nymphoides peltata*,  
*Potamogeton praelongus*, *Potamogeton trichoides*, *Potamogeton compressus*, *Polygonum mite*,  
*Rumex palustris*.

**22. Noteworthy fauna:**

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.

**Birds****Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species with peak counts in winter:**

Great cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*, 241 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)  
NW Europe

Bean goose , <i>Anser fabalis fabalis</i> , NW Europe - wintering	13 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean for 1996/7-2000/01)
Tufted duck , <i>Aythya fuligula</i> , NW Europe	1459 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Hen harrier, <i>Circus cyaneus</i> , Europe	12 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (6 year mean 1982-1987)
Common coot , <i>Fulica atra atra</i> , NW Europe	2102 individuals, representing an average of 1.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Ruff , <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> , Europe/W Africa	292 individuals, representing an average of 41.7% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

### Species Information

#### Species occurring at levels of international importance.

##### Fish.

*Cobitis taenia*.

##### Invertebrates.

*Libellula fulva*, *Oulimnius major*

### 23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

Aesthetic  
 Environmental education/ interpretation  
 Livestock grazing  
 Non-consumptive recreation  
 Sport fishing  
 Sport hunting  
 Transportation/navigation

**b)** Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? No

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

**24. Land tenure/ownership:**

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
Private	+	+

**25. Current land (including water) use:**

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	
Arable agriculture (unspecified)	+	+
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	
Hay meadows	+	
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	
Flood control	+	
Transport route	+	+

**26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:**

*Explanation of reporting category:*

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

*NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.*

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?
Vegetation succession	2	Adverse change in vegetation community type in relation to changing hydrological regime (increased levels of annual inundation) and decades of high nutrient-status of receiving water.	+		+
Eutrophication	2	High nutrient levels caused by sewage treatment works and agricultural runoff.	+		+
Reservoir/barrage/dam impact: flooding	2	Recent decades have seen an increase in occurrence of spring flooding and winter flood depths. These two factors have had an adverse impact on vegetation and bird features of the site.	+		+

For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?  
Vegetation succession - Defra is leading a working group to formulate possible solutions to the problems identified for the site.

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? YES
-------------------------------------------------------

**27. Conservation measures taken:**

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	
Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	

**b) Describe any other current management practices:**

The management of Ramsar sites in the UK is determined by either a formal management plan or through other management planning processes, and is overseen by the relevant statutory conservation agency. Details of the precise management practises are given in these documents.

**28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

**29. Current scientific research and facilities:**

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

**Fauna.**

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Breeding bird surveys.

Spined loach *Cobitis taenia* surveys.

**Miscellaneous.**

Refer to Ouse Washes Management Strategy (English Nature *et al.* 19\*\*) for further information on current and proposed monitoring/research.

**30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:**

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have information centres at the site.

**31. Current recreation and tourism:**

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

**Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.**

RSPB, WWT information centres and public bird-watching hides.

**32. Jurisdiction:**

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Head, Natura 2000 and Ramsar Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,

European Wildlife Division, Zone 1/07, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB



### 33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Site Designations Manager, English Nature, Sites and Surveillance Team, Northminster House,  
Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, UK

### 34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

#### Site-relevant references

- Bass, J, Blackburn, J & Giraudy, C (2003) Range extension of the 'Witham orb mussel' *Sphaerium solidum* (Normand) (Bivalvia: Sphaeriidae) or an overlooked resident of the Great Ouse? *Journal of Conchology*, **38**(1), 61-65
- Cadbury, CJ, Halshaw, L & Tidswell, R (1993) *Status and management of the ditch and pool flora of the Ouse Washes, 1992: comparisons with 1978*. English Nature/ Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Peterborough/ Sandy/ Slimbridge
- Cranswick, PA, Waters, RJ, Musgrove, AJ & Pollitt, MS (1997) *The Wetland Bird Survey 1995–96: wildfowl and wader counts*. British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge
- English Nature *et al.* (19\*\*) *The Ouse Washes Management Strategy*. English Nature
- Gibbons, B (2002) Reserve focus: The Ouse Washes, Cambridgeshire. *British Wildlife*, **13**(4), 267-270
- Green, RE, Cadbury, CJ & Williams, G (1987) Floods threaten black-tailed godwits breeding at the Ouse Washes. *RSPB Conservation Review*, **1**, 14-16
- McLeod, CR, Yeo, M, Brown, AE, Burn, AJ, Hopkins, JJ & Way, SF (eds.) (2004) *The Habitats Directive: selection of Special Areas of Conservation in the UK*. 2nd edn. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.  
[www.jncc.gov.uk/SACselection](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/SACselection)
- Musgrove, AJ, Pollitt, MS, Hall, C, Hearn, RD, Holloway, SJ, Marshall, PE, Robinson, JA & Cranswick, PA (2001) *The Wetland Bird Survey 1999–2000: wildfowl and wader counts*. British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge.  
[www.wwt.org.uk/publications/default.asp?PubID=14](http://www.wwt.org.uk/publications/default.asp?PubID=14)
- National Rivers Authority (1991) *Ouse Washes flood control* National Rivers Authority
- Posthoorn, R, Kuijken, E & Salathé, T (2001) *Ramsar Advisory Missions: No. 49, Ouse Washes, United Kingdom (2001)*. Ramsar Convention Bureau, Gland. [www.ramsar.org/ram\\_rpt\\_49e.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/ram_rpt_49e.htm)
- Ratcliffe, DA (ed.) (1977) *A Nature Conservation Review. The selection of biological sites of national importance to nature conservation in Britain*. Cambridge University Press (for the Natural Environment Research Council and the Nature Conservancy Council), Cambridge (2 vols.)
- Ratcliffe, N, Schmitt, S & Whiffin, M (2005) Sink or swim? Viability of a black-tailed godwit population in relation to flooding. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, **42**(5), 834-843
- Shirt, DB (ed.) (1987) *British Red Data Books: 2. Insects*. Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough
- Stroud, DA, Chambers, D, Cook, S, Buxton, N, Fraser, B, Clement, P, Lewis, P, McLean, I, Baker, H & Whitehead, S (eds.) (2001) *The UK SPA network: its scope and content*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough (3 vols.)  
[www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm)

Please return to: **Ramsar Secretariat, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland**

Telephone: +41 22 999 0170 • Fax: +41 22 999 0169 • email: [ramsar@ramsar.org](mailto:ramsar@ramsar.org)