

## CITATION

### CREE ESTUARY SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST Dumfries and Galloway

Site code: 461

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NX465545

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 83  
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 311

AREA: 3441.88 hectares

## NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Geomorphology: Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland

Biological:

Intertidal marine habitats: Mudflat

Coastlands: Saltmarsh

Birds: Pink-footed goose  
(*Anser brachyrhynchus*), non-breeding

Freshwater and estuarine fish: Smelt (*Osmerus eperlanus*)

## DESCRIPTION

The Cree Estuary, one of the most extensive and continuous stretches of saltmarsh and mudflats in Galloway, lies due south of Newton Stewart and includes Wigtown Sands and Baldoon Sands. The mudflats, rich in invertebrates, and the closely-grazed merse provide feeding areas for a large number of birds. The site is of geomorphological and ornithological interest, supporting an internationally important population of wintering pink-footed geese. The estuary is also one of only three locations in Scotland where the nationally rare fish, the smelt *Osmerus eperlanus*, is known to spawn.

The site also supports several over-wintering bird populations reaching national importance, including pintail, oystercatcher, whooper swan and golden plover.

The saltmarshes of the Cree estuary demonstrate well the geomorphological features of fringing estuarine saltmarsh. The creek system is dendritic, especially in the north close to the Cree exit, although the creeks in the south have been artificially straightened. Saltpans are distributed over all marsh levels, particularly on the marshes adjacent to the Cree exit. Parts of the saltmarsh have developed very recently and independently of the complex of saltmarshes in the inner Solway Firth. For example, the marsh at the Baldoon Sands on the west side of the estuary has mainly developed since 1847. In spite of this recent development, estuarine sedimentation has prevailed in the Cree estuary over most of the Holocene Epoch because all of the present

saltmarshes are backed by extensive areas of emerged estuarine flats known in Scotland as 'carse'.

The flora of the merse is typical of grazed saltmarsh areas, being dominated by red fescue, common saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia maritima* and a sward with an abundance of thrift, sea milkwort and sea aster. Species which tend to be sensitive to grazing, including several locally rare plants and those at their north-western limits, are found on small areas of ungrazed merse and shingle. These include common sea-lavender, lax-flowered sea-lavender, annual sea-blite, sea-kale and sea radish.

## **NOTIFICATION HISTORY**

First notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949: 1956, 1958.

Re-notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: 31 March 1987 with a significant increase in area of 2864 ha.

Notification reviewed under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004: 28 September 2010.

## **REMARKS**

Measured area of site corrected from (3456.5 ha).

Most of Cree Estuary SSSI is declared as part of Wigtown Bay Local Nature Reserve.

Part of Cree Estuary SSSI overlaps part of the River Bladnoch Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for the European species:

- Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*).

Cree Estuary SSSI is adjacent to Lower River Cree SSSI which is also notified for smelt (*Osmerus eperlanus*).