

CITATION

INNER TAY ESTUARY SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Perth and Kinross, Fife, Dundee City

Site code: 809

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NO 197191 to NO 390292 (north shore)
NO 198185 to NO 395263 (south shore)
NO 224188 (Mugdrum Island)

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 53, 54, 58, 59
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 370, 371, 380

AREA: 4115.38 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological: Birds: Greylag goose *Anser anser*, non-breeding
Pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, non-breeding
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, non-breeding
Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, non-breeding
Bearded tit *Panurus biarmicus*, breeding
Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, breeding
Water rail *Rallus aquaticus*, breeding
Breeding bird assemblage

Coastlands: Saltmarsh

Fens: Transition saltmarsh

DESCRIPTION

The Tay Estuary is one of the largest estuaries in Scotland. It stretches for approximately 20km from the confluence of the Rivers Earn and Tay in the west to the Tay rail bridge in the east, and is 2.5km at its widest. The site consists primarily of inter-tidal sand and mud flats that extend seawards out to the main channel, the majority of which lie on the northern side of the estuary. The site is important for its wintering populations of roosting grey geese, its breeding birds, including several nationally important populations, its saltmarsh habitats, and habitats demonstrating the transition from saltmarsh to freshwater fens and dry land.

The mudflats, sandbanks and Mugdrum Island offer safe roosting places for nationally important numbers of wintering geese (greylag goose *Anser anser* and pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*), whose numbers are at their highest during autumn and spring passage. The site holds nationally important numbers of goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* and cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* which feed over the inter-tidal sandbanks and mudflats at high tide; cormorants also roost on the sand bars at low water. Although not part of the notified interest, the estuary also supports large populations of migratory and wintering waders such as dunlin *Calidris alpina*, bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica* and redshank *Tringa totanus*.

The estuary is notable for its extensive areas of reedbed and saltmarsh habitats. At the seaward end of the site there are areas of estuarine saltmarsh of which there are relatively few extensive examples on the east coast of Scotland. A number of locally rare saltmarsh plants occur including sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus*, grey bulrush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* and common saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia maritima*.

The *Phragmites* reedbeds are the main transitional saltmarsh habitats. The reedbed on the north shore of the estuary is thought to be the largest continuous stand of this species in Britain. The reedbeds are unusual because they are flooded at spring tides; in the inner estuary the tide is usually fresh water, but becomes increasing brackish downstream. A number of locally rare plants occur in the reedbeds such as whorl grass *Catabrosa aquatica*.

The reedbeds also provide nesting habitat for nationally important populations of bearded tit, marsh harrier and water rail which, in combination with species like reed bunting, reed warbler and sedge warbler, form part of the breeding bird assemblage for the site.

Although not a part of the notified interest, due to their size and northerly estuarine situation, the reedbeds and wetlands also support a rich assemblage of insects, some of which are unknown elsewhere in Scotland. The abundance of insect life also attracts large numbers of swallows and sand martins on their autumn passage.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949:
1955 (as Mugdrum Island SSSI),
1972 (as Tay Estuary and Mugdrum Island SSSI),
1973 (as Tay Estuary SSSI).

Notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: 23 August 1985 (as Inner Tay Estuary SSSI) with a 1143 ha increase in area.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 25 August 1999 with a 1348 ha increase in area.

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

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 6748 ha) to exclude area below MLWS.

Part of Inner Tay Estuary SSSI overlaps with part of Balmerino - Wormit Shore SSSI which is notified for old red sandstone igneous geology.

Inner Tay Estuary SSSI is contiguous to Flisk Wood SSSI.

Inner Tay Estuary SSSI is part of the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is designated for the European habitats and species listed below:

Habitats: Estuaries
Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
Subtidal sandbanks

Species: Common seal *Phoca vitulina*

Inner Tay Estuary SSSI is part of the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for the birds listed below:

Bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*, non-breeding
Common scoter *Melanitta nigra*, non-breeding
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, non-breeding
Dunlin *Calidris alpina alpina*, non-breeding
Eider *Somateria mollissima*, non-breeding
Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, non-breeding
Goosander *Mergus merganser*, non-breeding
Grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, non-breeding
Greylag goose *Anser anser*, non-breeding
Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*, non-breeding
Little tern *Sterna albifrons*, breeding
Long-tailed duck *Clangula hyemalis*, non-breeding
Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, breeding
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, non-breeding
Pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, non-breeding
Red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator*, non-breeding
Redshank *Tringa totanus*, non-breeding
Sanderling *Calidris alba*, non-breeding
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, non-breeding
Velvet scoter *Melanitta fusca*, non-breeding
Waterfowl assemblage, non-breeding