

COUNTY: CLEVELAND **SITE NAME:** COWPEN MARSH

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended.

Local Planning Authorities: Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

National Grid Reference: NZ 500529

Area: 25.7 (ha.)	63.5 (ac.)	Hartlepool
91.1 (ha.)	225.1 (ac.)	Stockton
116.8 (ha.)	288.6 (ac.)	Total

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 93 **1:25,000:** NZ 42, NZ 52

First Notified: 1966*

Revision Date: 1988

Date Notified: 12/1/89

Other Information:

1. This site forms part of 'Teesmouth Flats' and Marshes', a complex of sites listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe (1977). Cambridge University Press.
2. Teesmouth Flats and Marshes are of international importance and meet the criteria for designation under the terms of the European Community Directive 79/409 EEC or the Conservation of Wild Birds and for inclusion on the list of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.
3. During the 1988 revision the boundary of the site has been amended to both extend the site and exclude a small area of land previously notified*.
4. Part of Cowpen Marsh is managed as a nature reserve by the Cleveland Nature Conservation Trust.

Description:

The site known as Cowpen Marsh includes the largest saltmarsh between Lindisfarne and the Humber Estuary and together with adjacent coastal grazing marshes and mudflats it provides an important wintering site for migratory wildfowl and wading birds. It forms an integral part of Tees Estuary, a site of international importance for overwintering shore birds.

Along the southern side of Greatham Creek the saltmarsh is dominated by common saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia maritima* with sea aster *Aster tripolium*. Higher levels of the marsh support species-rich associations of red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sea plantain *Plantago maritima*, sea arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima*, greater sea-spurry *Spergularia media* and sea milkwort *Glaux maritima* and there is an unusual community of common sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare* with thrift *Armeria maritima* which occurs here close to the northern edge of its range in eastern Britain. North of the creek pioneer communities of glasswort *Salicornia* spp. and annual seablite on the intertidal mud are succeeded by common saltmarsh-grass and sea aster.

The coastal grazing marsh, which comprises semi-improved neutral grassland dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and red fescue is divided by shallow, seasonally damp, fleets supporting tufted hairgrass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans* and marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*. Other deep water fleets, some brackish support sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*, grey club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontanii*, wild celery *Apium graveolens*, reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* and brackish water-crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii* with celery-leaved buttercup

Ranunculus scleratus, sea rush *Juncus maritimus* and mare's-tail *Hippurus vulgaris* along their grazed margins.

Greatham Creek and Cowpen Marsh together provide important roosting and feeding grounds for large numbers of migratory wildfowl and wading birds which also feed on the intertidal flats around the Tees Estuary. More than 1000 birds have been recorded here on a regular basis throughout the winter months including peak counts of wigeon (300), teal (420), curlew (520), redshank (610), bar-tailed godwit (145), lapwing (600), golden plover (770) and dunlin (320). The grazing marsh supports breeding mallard, teal, moorhen, coot, redshank, snipe, lapwing, reedbunting and yellow wagtail.

* Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.