

COUNTY: CLEVELAND **SITE NAME:** SEATON DUNES AND COMMON

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

Local Planning Authority: Hartlepool Borough Council

National Grid Reference: NZ 535285 **Area:** 312.1 (ha.) 771.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 93 **1:10,000:** NZ 52 NW

First Notified: 1966* **Revision Date:** 1985

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--09/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds and for inclusion on the list of Westlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.
3. The boundary of the site has been modified.

Description:

Seaton Dunes and Common is an area of considerable importance for its flora, invertebrate fauna, and bird life. The range of habitats present include sandy, muddy and rocky foreshore, dunes, dune slacks and dune grassland, as well as relict saltmarsh, grazed freshwater marsh with dykes (known locally as fleets and stells) pools and seawalls.

Marram grass *Ammophila arenaria* dominates the main dunes with large populations of sea lyme grass *Elymus arenarius*, sand couch *Agropyron junceiforme* and sea rocket *Cakile maritima* on their seaward side. The dune flora is particularly rich and includes the nationally rare rush-leaved fescue *Festuca juncifolia* and sea couch *Agrophyron pungens* and its northernmost locality, as well as purple milk vetch *Astragalus danicus*, blue fleabane *Erigeron acer* and yellow wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* which have a limited distribution and are associated with the lime-rich slag of the dune covered sea walls. On the landward side of the dunes there is an extensive growth of sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* and areas of dune slack supporting large populations of common spotted and marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza* spp. as well as their hybrids including several locally rare forms. The remainder of the site is primarily dune grassland and grazed freshwater marsh with associated fleets, stells, pools and seawalls dominated by various grasses, rushes and reeds with uncommon plants such as strawberry clover *Trifolium fragiferum*, wild celery *Apium graveolens*, knotted hedge parsley *Torilis nodosa* and adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. A small area of relict saltmarsh vegetation is present including stiff saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia rupestris* of local distribution throughout Britain.

The snail *Hydrobia ventrosa* is present at its most northerly site on the East Coast of England. In addition, two nationally rare species of beetle occur here, namely, *Hydnobius perrisi* and *Philonthus atratus* as well as the rare spider *Silometopus incurvatus*.

Seaton Sands, North Gare Sands and Seaton Snook dunes provide important winter feeding grounds and roost sites for various species of wading birds including sanderling, knot, ringed plover, turnstone, oystercatcher, dunlin and grey plover. The Teesmouth population of sanderling exceeds internationally important levels and up to half of the 1200 birds (5.7% of the W. European population) feed and roost within the

SSSI. Similarly, large populations of knot winter at Teesmouth, when up to 10,000 birds (3% of the W. European population) may roost on Seaton Snook Dunes during high tide. The populations of other species of wading birds reach nationally significant levels, with up to 200 ringed plover (about 1% of the W. European population) and approximately 250 turnstone (2.4% of the UK wintering population) present within the site prior to migration. Large numbers of common, arctic and sandwich terns (3,500 at peak counts) also frequent the Seaton Snook area on migration.

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