

## SITE SYNOPSIS

**SITE NAME: BLACKWATER ESTUARY SPA**

**SITE CODE: 004028**

The Blackwater Estuary SPA is a moderately-sized, sheltered south-facing estuary, which extends from Youghal New Bridge to the Ferry Point peninsula, close to where the river enters the sea. It comprises a section of the main channel of the River Blackwater to Ballynaclash Quay. At low tide, intertidal flats are exposed on both sides of the channel. On the eastern side the intertidal channel as far as Kinsalebeg and Moord Cross Roads is included, while on the west side the site includes part of the estuary of the Tourig River as far as Kilmagner.

The intertidal sediments are mostly muds or sandy muds, reflecting the sheltered conditions of the estuary. Green algae (*Ulva* spp.) are frequent on the mudflats during summer, and Bladder Wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*) occurs on the upper more stony shorelines. The sediments have a macrofauna typical of muddy sands, with polychaete worms such as Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*), Ragworm (*Hediste diversicolor*) and the marine bristle worm *Nephtys hombergii* being common. Salt marshes fringe the estuarine channels, especially in the sheltered creeks.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Wigeon, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Redshank. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands and, as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds.

The Blackwater Estuary is of high ornithological importance for wintering waterfowl, providing good quality feeding areas for an excellent diversity of waterfowl species. At high tide, the birds roost along the shoreline and salt marsh fringe, especially in the Kinsalebeg area. The site supports an internationally important population of Black-tailed Godwit (620) and has a further seven species with nationally important populations: Wigeon (953), Golden Plover (2,628), Lapwing (3,054), Dunlin (1,807), Bar-tailed Godwit (161), Curlew (1,007) and Redshank (520) - all figures are mean peaks for the five winters 1995/96 to 1999/2000.

Other species which occur include Light-bellied Brent Goose (19), Shelduck (123), Teal (407), Mallard (105), Shoveler (21), Red-breasted Merganser (7), Cormorant (43), Little Egret (12), Grey Heron (17), Oystercatcher (401), Ringed Plover (28), Grey Plover (49), Knot (43), Greenshank (25) and Turnstone (52). The site is also notable for the large concentrations of gulls that occur in autumn and winter, including Lesser Black-backed Gull (390), Black-headed Gull (345), Common Gull (253), Great Black-backed Gull (227) and Herring Gull (64).

The Blackwater Estuary SPA is an internationally important wetland site on account of the population of Black-tailed Godwit it supports. It is also of high importance in a national context, with seven species having populations which exceed the thresholds for national importance. The occurrence of Little Egret, Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit is of particular note as these species are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. The Blackwater Estuary is also a Ramsar Convention site.