

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 02 February 1998

3. Country:

UK (England)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Avon Valley

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for: Updated information on an existing Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area:

** Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

7. Map of site included:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) *Yes*
- iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

50 47 02 N 01 47 46 W

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Nearest town/city: Christchurch

Located adjacent to the central south coast of England, west of the Solent. The site is orientated north to south between Bickton and Christchurch, and part of the site comprises the county boundary between Hampshire and Dorset.

Administrative region: Dorset; Hampshire

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **11. Area** (hectares): 1385.1

Min.	3
Max.	26
Mean	16

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

The site encompasses the lower reaches of the River Avon and its floodplain between Bickton and Christchurch. The River Avon displays wide fluctuations in water level and parts of the valley are regularly flooded in winter. The Avon valley has a greater range of habitats and a more diverse flora and fauna than any other chalk river in Britain. The valley includes one of the largest expanses of unimproved floodplain grassland in Britain, including extensive areas managed as hay meadow.

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

1, 2, 6

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 1

The site shows a greater range of habitats than any other chalk river in Britain, including fen, mire, lowland wet grassland and small areas of woodland.

Ramsar criterion 2

The site supports a diverse assemblage of wetland flora and fauna including several nationally-rare species.

Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species with peak counts in winter:

Gadwall , *Anas strepera strepera*, NW Europe 537 individuals, representing an average of 3.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species/populations identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration under criterion 6.

Species with peak counts in winter:

Northern pintail , *Anas acuta*, NW Europe 715 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*, Iceland/W Europe 1142 individuals, representing an average of 3.2% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which is updated annually. See www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm.

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

16. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	basic, neutral, sand, mud, clay, alluvium, peat, nutrient-rich, sedimentary, limestone, gravel
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, valley, floodplain, pools
Nutrient status	no information
pH	acidic, alkaline
Salinity	brackish / mixosaline, fresh
Soil	no information

Water permanence	usually permanent, usually seasonal / intermittent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Everton, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/everton.html) Max. daily temperature: 14.0° C Min. daily temperature: 7.0° C Days of air frost: 32.5 Rainfall: 763.7 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1750.7

General description of the Physical Features:

The Avon Valley encompasses the lower reaches of the River Avon and its floodplain on the south coast of England. The site extends for approximately 20 km between Bickton and Christchurch. The River Avon displays wide fluctuations in water level, and parts of the valley are regularly flooded in winter. Consequently, the valley includes one of the largest expanses of unimproved floodplain grassland in Britain, including extensive areas managed as hay meadows and grazing marsh under low-intensity agricultural systems.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

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18. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

Other, Flood water storage / desynchronisation of flood peaks

19. Wetland types:

Human-made wetland, Inland wetland

Code	Name	% Area
4	Seasonally flooded agricultural land	84.6
7	Gravel / brick / clay pits	12.5
M	Rivers / streams / creeks: permanent	1.8
Xf	Freshwater, tree-dominated wetlands	1.1

20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

The main habitat types of this site are, seasonally-flooded mesotrophic grassland, including traditionally managed hay-meadow, dry acid grassland on windblown sand, standing freshwater, including seasonal floodwaters and gravel pits.

Chalk river with acidic tributaries, characterised by floating *Ranunculus*, and fen and mire are also present.

Ecosystem services

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Nationally important species occurring on the site.**Higher Plants.**

Cyperus fuscus (IUCN – Vulnerable; Nationally Rare; Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 8; RDB)

Pulicaria vulgaris (IUCN – Vulnerable; Nationally Rare, Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 8; RDB)

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Birds**Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:**

Lesser black-backed gull , *Larus fuscus graellsii*, 944 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species with peak counts in winter:

Little grebe , *Tachybaptus ruficollis ruficollis*, 90 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Europe to E Urals, NW Africa

Little egret , *Egretta garzetta*, West 26 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Mediterranean

Greater white-fronted goose , *Anser albifrons albifrons*, NW Europe 79 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (Source period not collated)

Northern shoveler , *Anas clypeata*, NW & C 177 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Europe

Species Information**Nationally important species occurring on the site.****Invertebrates.**

Libellula fulva, *Valvata macrostoma*, *Vertigo moulinsiana* (Habitats Directive Annex II (S1016)),
Pisidium tenuilineatum (all Nationally Rare).

Mammals

Otter *Lutra lutra* (Habitats Directive Annex II, Annex IV (S1355))

Water vole *Arvicola terrestris* (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5)

23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

Aesthetic

Archaeological/historical site

Environmental education/ interpretation
 Fisheries production
 Livestock grazing
 Non-consumptive recreation
 Scientific research
 Sport fishing
 Sport hunting
 Traditional cultural

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? No

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	
Private	+	+
Private	+	
Public/communal	+	

25. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism		+
Recreation	+	+
Commercial forestry	+	+
Cutting/coppicing for firewood/fuel		+
Fishing: (unspecified)	+	+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	+
Freshwater aquaculture		+
Shifting arable agriculture		+
Permanent arable agriculture		+
Grazing (unspecified)	+	+
Rough or shifting grazing		+
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+	+
Hay meadows	+	+

Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Harbour/port		+
Flood control	+	+
Irrigation (incl. agricultural water supply)		+
Mineral exploration (excl. hydrocarbons)	+	+
Transport route		+
Domestic water supply	+	
Urban development		+
Non-urbanised settlements		+

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?
Disturbance to vegetation through cutting / clearing	1		+		
Vegetation succession	2	Major issue arising from decline in traditional pastoral agriculture and lack of maintenance of ditch network.	+	+	+
Drainage/land-claim for agriculture	2	Management of water levels driven partly by agriculture but also urban flood risk management continues to have adverse effect on habitats.	+	+	+
Sedimentation/siltation	2	High levels of silt in river continue to degrade its interest, especially aquatic species but also contribute to silting-up ditches and deterioration of grasslands after flood events.		+	+
Introduction/invasion of non-native plant species	2	<i>Crassula helmsii</i> is increasing problem in Blashford Lakes following restoration of gravel pits, not controlled adequately through planning consents and technically difficult to control following withdrawal of herbicide approval.	+	+	+
Pollution – domestic sewage	2			+	+
Pollution – agricultural fertilisers	2			+	+

Recreational/tourism disturbance (unspecified)	2	Site is subject to wildfowling and game shooting, and associated activities (e.g. shooting hides, game cover management, pheasant release pens, etc); full extent/intensity unknown but known to be considerable. Likewise fishing and related activities (e.g. fish stocking, vehicular and pedestrian access, fencing of river banks, vegetation management etc.). Access by people and dogs both on and off public rights of way is also a significant cause of disturbance in some areas.	+	+	+
Reservoir/barrage/dam impact: flow regime	2		+	+	+

For category 2 factors only.

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Vegetation succession - Being addressed through agri-environment schemes (currently ESA; ES and HLS in future), linked to development of Water Level Management Plan (WLMP), but take-up of enhancement/restoration options is low. CAP reform is a significant threat; various initiatives are being explored to help improve economic viability of appropriate agricultural enterprises e.g. through EU LIFE and LEADER+ programmes.

Issues leading to vegetation succession to be addressed through enhanced liaison with landowners/occupiers, ESA scheme, management agreements and site management statements, assisted by powers under CROW Act.

Drainage/land-claim for agriculture - Being addressed through Water Level Management Plan (WLMP) and agri-environment scheme, but factors complex and off-site effects in upstream catchment even more difficult to address. Catchment Management Plans and similar initiatives may help in due course. Also need for restoration of New Forest mires etc. in this catchment, comparable to work under LIFE project elsewhere in the New Forest, to help ameliorate flow rates in New Forest streams and thus reduce pressure for low water levels in River Avon. Appointment of Avon Valley Project Officer (Hampshire Wildlife Trust) for three years to promote positive management.

Sedimentation/siltation - Being addressed through ESA/ agri-environment schemes and Landcare project in upper catchment, but uptake low. Issues and potential solutions as for drainage. Further implementation and promotion of ESA scheme, good agricultural practice and Landcare project are needed.

Introduction/invasion of non-native plant species - Invasion of river banks by invasive non-native plants (e.g. *Impatiens glandulifera*, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is to be addressed through EU LIFE project if bid successful.

Pollution – domestic sewage - Being addressed through Asset Management Plan AMP programme with water companies and EA Review of Consents under Habitats Regulations, but smaller villages and rural areas often have private drainage which is largely outside these processes. Further sewage treatment works inputs to be addressed once initial improvements in place.

Pollution – agricultural fertilisers - Being addressed through ESA/agri-environment and Landcare projects in upper catchment, but low uptake. Changes may arise following CAP reform. ESA scheme promotes arable reversion and creation of buffer strips alongside water courses. Upstream Landcare pilot projects aim to reduce run-off.

Recreational/tourism disturbance (unspecified) - Sporting activities largely unregulated, as existing at time of SSSI notification. Managed through voluntary agreement where possible. Under current legislation renotification of SSSI will be required to bring under regulatory control.

Review of Blashford Lakes Management Plan to ensure recreation/tourism impacts on SPA/Ramsar interests are minimised. Site management statements with owners and occupiers.

Reservoir/barrage/dam impact: flow regime - Water abstraction issues to be addressed through EA Regulation 50 Review of Consents process. Sluice management to be addressed through Water Level Management Plan where possible, but there are long-term issues over sustainability of major structures, as many in private ownership require costly repair, restoration or replacement.

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? YES

27. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	+
National Nature Reserve (NNR)		+
Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation		+
Management agreement	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Other	+	
Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA)	+	+
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	
Management plan in preparation	+	

b) Describe any other current management practices:

The management of Ramsar sites in the UK is determined by either a formal management plan or through other management planning processes, and is overseen by the relevant statutory conservation agency. Details of the precise management practises are given in these documents.

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Fauna.

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Breeding waders monitored annually at selected habitat enhancement sites by Environment Agency, and less frequently over wider area by BTO and Game Conservancy Trust.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

There is a study centre with laboratory facilities available for local schools and institutions. Also has formal and informal hides. Increased use/development of these facilities plus further interpretation, leaflets etc. planned under LIFE project and possible HLF bid if successful.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

Activities and facilities provided.

Informal walking, coarse-fish and game-fish angling, localised sailing and watersports at Blashford Lakes, birdwatching, wildfowling and game shooting. Most land is private with no public access apart from a very few public footpaths, but extensive views from adjoining land.

Seasonality.

Coarse fishing mid-June to mid-March; game fishing September-March.

Wildfowling and game shooting take place during autumn and winter.

32. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Head, Natura 2000 and Ramsar Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
European Wildlife Division, Zone 1/07, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol,
BS1 6EB

33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Site Designations Manager, English Nature, Sites and Surveillance Team, Northminster House,
Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA, UK

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

McLeod, CR, Yeo, M, Brown, AE, Burn, AJ, Hopkins, JJ & Way, SF (eds.) (2004) *The Habitats Directive: selection of Special Areas of Conservation in the UK*. 2nd edn. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.
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Musgrove, AJ, Pollitt, MS, Hall, C, Hearn, RD, Holloway, SJ, Marshall, PE, Robinson, JA & Cranswick, PA (2001) *The Wetland Bird Survey 1999–2000: wildfowl and wader counts*. British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge.
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Wheeldon, J (2003) *The River Avon cSAC Conservation Strategy*. English Nature, Devizes. www.english-nature.org.uk/lifeinukrivers/strategies/Avon/avon.html

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