

www.naturalengland.org.uk



Teesmouth

National Nature Reserve



- National Nature Reserve Boundary
- Footpath
- P** Parking
- H** Hide



Hartlepool

A178

Seaton Carew

B1377

P

NORTH GARE

Teesmouth Field Centre

Power Station

Seaton Snook

Seaton on Tees Channel

Teesmouth

SEAL SANDS

Oil Terminal

ConocoPhillips Site

A178

H

Seal Sands Easy Access Path

P

H

Billingham & Middlesbrough



Shelduck © North East Wildlife

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve

Teesmouth is a National Nature Reserve with a difference – it is surrounded by one of the largest concentrations of heavy industry in Britain.

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve is:

- an extraordinary blend of industry and nature;
- home, for much of the year, to thousands of migratory waterbirds;
- a place of important scientific research;
- and - as a result – a surprise to visitors.

The reserve covers over 350 hectares in two sections separated by Hartlepool Power Station. North Gare lies to the north and Seal Sands to the south.

For North Gare, access is on foot from the car park, off the A178. Old sea walls, sand dunes and areas of saltmarsh mingle across the site. Both dunes and saltmarsh support a wide variety of plants; in spring and summer the ground is studded with brightly-coloured flowers. In winter, large flocks of knot roost at Seaton Snook and birds of prey, such as merlin, hunt over the dunes.

For Seal Sands, leave vehicles in the car park at Cowpen Marsh, cross the road, turn left and follow the Seal Sands Easy Access Path to the right alongside Greatham Creek. Seal Sands is famous for its common and grey seals. At low tide an area of mudflats, the largest such intertidal habitat between the Humber Estuary and Lindisfarne in North Northumberland, is nationally important as a winter home for several hundred shelduck. Two observation hides offer views of waterbirds and seals.

The Reserve and its surroundings

Despite the enormous impact of industry on the area, the reserve is not the only part of the Tees Estuary to have special significance for nature. The reserve boundaries encompass parts of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest; together with parts of a further four, these make up Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, which is of international importance for wildlife.

The land and the sea

For thousands of years, the sea swept across the Tees Estuary at high tide, and exposed mudflats and sand each low tide. Local people, eager for more land, built sea defences to exclude the high tide from its customary haunts. Gradually, the ground became solid and lost its saltiness. Areas still covered by the sea at the highest tides developed as saltmarshes. Here sheep grazed and grew the thick fleeces sold by medieval monks to much of Europe, making monasteries the richest organisations in Britain.

Outside the old sea defences, sand formed dunes. The process continues, with sand blown against the sea walls stabilising as grasses begin to grow on it. Elsewhere, the dunes continue to move with the wind.

Seaton Dunes © Mike Leakey/Natural England





Knot © North East Wildlife

Birds

At any time of year, interesting birds can be seen. Migratory ducks and waders have always visited the Estuary. The new industrial conditions may create problems, but also opportunities. For example, lighting helps waders to feed round the clock, and security fences may prevent people causing accidental disturbance.

In winter, knot from Greenland and the Canadian Arctic, shelduck, teal and sanderling are seen. In spring, ringed plover, lapwing, oystercatcher, snipe and small numbers of shelduck nest.

Sandwich terns, having bred further north, come here for a few weeks during July and August. Cormorant, curlew and redshank arrive in large numbers for the autumn.

More than 20,000 individual waterfowl visit Teesmouth during a year. Durham University research since the 1960s has enabled Teesmouth to make an enormous contribution to international scientific understanding of wading birds.

Apart from the wildfowl and waders, short-eared owls hunt across North Gare, while merlin and peregrine enjoy rich pickings on Seal Sands. Skylark and meadow pipit nest on the fixed dunes.

Butterflies, moths and invertebrates

Common blue is the most conspicuous butterfly. Burnet moth is often seen. There are many other invertebrates, including scarce moths, beetles, spiders, harvestmen and snails.

Plants

Of all the plants here, perhaps the most spectacular are four different species of marsh orchids which flower in June and July on the damp dune grassland behind North Gare Sands. Lady's bedstraw and bird's-foot trefoil spangle the fixed dunes. Purple milk vetch, strawberry clover, adder's-tongue fern and various sedges are also found. Although less colourful, there are two nationally scarce species of grass. Sand couch, marram grass and lyme grass colonise the dunes.



Burnet Moth © North East Wildlife



Marsh Orchid © Mike Leakey/Natural England

Seals

These magnificent sea mammals became extinct in the Tees Estuary during the 19th century, as a result of pollution, disturbance and hunting. During the late 20th century the seals (mostly common and a few grey) returned, and since the late 1980s common seals have begun to breed and rear their pups here once again.



Common Seal © Mike Leakey/Natural England

Salt, slag and skyline

Industry here is not just a modern phenomenon. In medieval times, the salt industry had begun to change the Tees Estuary. Near the car park at North Gare Sands, you can still see the grass-covered mounds of ash from the fires which evaporated sea water to crystallize the valuable salt.

Over the centuries, land was reclaimed from the sea. Eventually, nearly 90 per cent of the mudflats and sand which had been washed by the sea twice a day were embanked and converted into solid land.



Seaton Common © Mike Leakey/Natural England

Eighteenth century industrialists saw the potential of easy access along deep sea channels. Raw materials, such as coal, could be shipped out by sea. Manufacturing industries using coal then developed here, exporting iron, steel and engineering products. Today, massive industries processing oil and chemicals, extracting salt from underground deposits and producing nuclear power all have claim on what was once tidal ground. Their imposing structures dominate the skyline of the reserve.

Caring for the reserve

Natural England and its predecessors have been involved with the site since 1966, when Seal Sands and Seaton Dunes and Common were first notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We aim to enhance the important habitats – areas that are home to plants, mammals, invertebrates and birds.

Some areas manage themselves if left alone. Other sites need human activity to ensure their survival under modern circumstances; for example, at North Gare, Natural England is introducing carefully controlled grazing, so that many flowering plants can survive without being swamped by strong-growing grasses; and on Seal Sands, a 10 hectare area has been excavated to recreate more of the now scarce intertidal mud. Elsewhere, special management prevents erosion damage by people.

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve

Directions

The reserve is located one mile east of the A178 north of Middlesbrough. It can be accessed by bus on Stagecoach service 1/1A, which operates half-hourly along the A178 between Hartlepool and Middlesbrough (hourly on Sundays).

Phone number

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve

Site Manager: 01429 853325
Teesmouth Field Centre: 01429 264912

Please note that bye-laws are in force on the reserve which include:

- No motorbikes (they damage plants and disturb birds)
- No fires (invertebrate populations are easily destroyed)
- Bait gathering may disturb birds and seals
- Keep dogs under very close control during the nesting season, April-July (nesting birds are easily disturbed)

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve was declared on 22 March 1995.

Teesmouth is one of more than 200 National Nature Reserves in England. Such places are among the best wildlife and earth heritage sites in the country and many are important in an international context. This reserve is managed by Natural England. We conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings. Natural England encourages people to become actively involved in nature conservation and welcome voluntary help on National Nature Reserves.

Natural England, North East,

The Quadrant, Newburn Riverside,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 8NZ

Tel: 0191 229 5500 **Fax:** 0191 229 5508

Email: northeast@naturalengland.org.uk
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Cover picture -Seal Sands © Peter Wakely/Natural England



Natural England will work for people, places and nature, to enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas; promoting access, recreation and public well-being, and contributing to the way natural resources are managed so that they can be enjoyed now and by future generations.

www.naturalengland.org.uk

© Natural England 2007

Designed by NEdesign, Leeds.
Ref. 1066
PB199664/1