




Good Practice Guidelines

Severn Estuary
European Marine Site

Your way to support our estuary



The purpose of these guidelines is to encourage the sustainable use of the estuary and its coastline, providing an enhanced and safer environment for recreational users and visitors to enjoy. Individuals and clubs are encouraged to respect, support and promote these guidelines.

Please help us to look after this special estuary.



www.asera.org.uk

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ASERA and the Severn Estuary Management Scheme



Organisations around the Severn Estuary have come together to form the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) to coordinate their statutory duties. ASERA has identified that disturbance from some recreational activities can affect the protected birds, habitats and fish in the estuary.

ASERA aims to raise awareness of the Severn Estuary European Marine Site and to ensure that human activities around the estuary are carried out in a way sympathetic to the nature conservation objectives of the site, making sure it's protected for our future generations.



Our Spectacular Severn

The Severn Estuary is one of the largest coastal plain estuaries in the UK, its immense tidal range and classic funnel shape making it unique in Britain and rare worldwide. Dynamic and diverse, it has fascinating natural, cultural and geographical features, managed and used by many organisations and individuals.

Our estuary supports nationally and internationally important habitats and species, and is a key migratory route for salmon and internationally rare fish species. The extensive mudflats, saltmarshes and coastal grazing marshes make it one of the most important estuaries in the UK for its numbers of wildfowl and wading birds, with over 80,000 birds visiting every winter. It is a key refuelling stop for important spring and autumn passage birds. Reefs of the tube-forming worm *Sabellaria alveolata* are also found here.

Working together we can reduce disturbance to the habitats and species of the Severn Estuary and keep our site special.

Disturbance is any activity or noise that could change behaviours of an animal (feeding, resting or breeding) or habitat structure. For example, repeated disturbance can threaten the survival of our estuary's birds. It may lead to birds stopping using an area to feed or roost, use up vital energy stores by putting them to flight and cause delays to arrival at breeding grounds. If they cannot feed enough to complete their migration, they may not survive the winter.

Activities undertaken around the estuary and its coastline need to ensure they are sympathetic to the needs of wildlife, especially the thousands of wintering birds that visit every year. Our estuary is particularly popular for recreational activities and so your actions really can make a difference!

Please help keep our coastline looking clean, beautiful and full of wildlife.



Severn Estuary European Marine Site

The Severn Estuary is internationally important for its habitats and species, designated as a:

- **Special Protection Area (SPA)**
Designated under the UK Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to protect overwintering and spring/autumn passage birds and the habitats which attract them.
- **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**
Designated under the UK Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to protect fish species and a variety of habitats.
- **Ramsar Site**
A wetland of international importance.

...collectively known as a European Marine Site (EMS)



The Severn Estuary is part of a national site network. These sites try to put people at the heart of nature conservation and are about “people and nature”, not “nature without people”.

Maps of the sensitive species and habitats found in the Severn Estuary EMS are available at:
www.asera.org.uk



Walking, Dog Walking & Cycling



- ✓ **Observe local byelaws and regulations on rights of access**
- ✓ **Stay on the permitted right of way to avoid impacts such as erosion and trampling of sensitive habitats like saltmarsh and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm)**
- ✓ **Follow the Sustrans Cycling Code of Conduct***
- ✓ **Dogs are prohibited from accessing certain stretches of the Severn Estuary coastline during the summer months – look out for local signs for further information**
- ✓ **Keep the coast enjoyable for all**
 - Clean up after your dog to keep the coast safe and clean for others – “bag it and bin it”.
 - Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly.
- ✓ **Keep your dog under effective control to protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance along the coast**
 - Make sure your dog stays at your side or on a lead where birds are feeding, breeding and resting.
 - Keep your dog in sight at all times, confident that it will return promptly on command.
 - It is good practice to keep your dog on a lead when around farm animals and horses.
 - Keep noise down.
- ✓ **Leave gates and property as you find them**

*www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2019/everyday-walking-and-cycling/advice-on-using-shared-use-paths

Bird Watching



✓ **Protect feeding, roosting and breeding birds by avoiding disturbance**

- Keep out of sight of flocks of birds if you can and do not approach them if you are visible to them, particularly when groups of birds gather at high water. High tide is a critical rest time for birds - with repeated disturbances they may stop using these roost sites.
- Use binoculars/telescopes to watch and enjoy birdlife from a distance.
- Keep your distance from breeding birds – many estuary birds nest on open ground.
- Be patient – let the birds adjust to you sharing their environment.

✓ **Protect habitats**

- Keep to designated routes, avoiding walking on wetter saltmarsh if you can – some of these areas are delicate and easily damaged.

✓ **Be aware that wildfowling occurs around the Severn Estuary**

✓ **Enjoy the estuary's famous nature reserves**

- Take opportunities to use facilities like hides provided at sites such as Slimbridge, Steart Marshes and Newport Wetlands.
- ## ✓ **Follow the RSPB Birdwatchers' Code***
- ## ✓ **Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly**

Recreational Angling



✓ Be a responsible angler

- Make sure you know what species you are allowed to catch and the local size limits- always return undersized fish with care. See minimum sizes here: www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk.
- Never gaff a fish to land it. Always use a net.
- If you intend to eat any fish you catch then make sure you dispatch them quickly and humanely.
- Release or return fish responsibly, allowing them time to recover if necessary.

✓ Protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance

- Approach the estuary using established paths.
- Keep your distance from groups of birds.
- Walk around saltmarsh and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm).
- Keep your dog under effective control to protect breeding, feeding and roosting birds.
- Cut line into short lengths before disposal.

✓ Handle the fish as little as possible, ideally using wet hands or gloves

- Be prepared to weigh, photograph and return fish quickly.

✓ Respect your personal safety and that of others at all times

- Always check the tide times before you leave – remember how quickly the tide moves in the Severn.
- See guidance on Safety on the Estuary.

✓ Take all of your waste and old tackle home

Bait Digging

✓ Be a responsible bait digger

- Do not take more worms than you can use.
- Take limited numbers of lugworm and do not take green spawning worms or king rag. These are the future supply of bait!
- The ragworm population is more vulnerable to exploitation than lugworm – be careful to leave plenty of adult worms to enable them to recover or consider buying ragworm.

✓ Protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance

- Approach the estuary using established paths.
- Keep your distance from groups of birds.
- Walk around saltmarsh and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm).
- Report any suspected discovery of archaeological material to your local Finds Liaison Officer: <https://finds.org.uk/contacts>.

✓ Backfill holes to maintain the intertidal habitat and for safety of others

✓ Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly

✓ Check permissions - landowner permission and other consents may be required

✓ Follow any local byelaws and regulations which affect the use of the Severn Estuary

- Respect private land ownership.
 - There is no legal right to collect bait commercially without the permission of the landowner.
- ## ✓ For your safety
- Always check the tide times before you leave – remember how quickly the tide moves in the Severn.
 - Be aware of the mudflats – the risk of getting stuck is real.
 - Avoid digging alone or let others know where you are and your expected return time and carry a charged mobile phone.
 - See guidance on Safety on the Estuary.



Recreational Boating



✓ **Protect feeding, roosting and breeding birds, and marine mammals by avoiding disturbance**

- Keep your distance and noise to a minimum, particularly near important bird roost sites in sheltered creeks and rivers.
- Certain areas, e.g. Bridgwater Bay, are important for breeding waders and moulting shelduck who cannot fly and are particularly sensitive to disturbance in the summer months.
- Keep your distance from marine mammals that sometimes travel further up the estuary.

✓ **Protect habitats**

- Approach the estuary using established paths and use recognised landing and launching points.
- Observe speed limits and slow down to keep your wake to a minimum near to the shore, particularly in pills, creeks and rivers and near mooring areas. Excessive wash in sheltered areas can damage habitats and disturb birds.
- Choose anchoring sites carefully, away from the most sensitive areas like eelgrass beds and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm).

This will help to protect wildlife and vegetation, particularly in shallow waters and over intertidal habitats.



- ✓ **Share the water – be considerate to other coastal and boat users, particularly swimmers and children in the water**
- ✓ **Never throw litter or waste overboard – bag it and take it home with you**
- ✓ **Check permissions – slipway permits and other consents may be required**
- ✓ **Follow The Green Blue's guidance for boat users and RYA Safe Boating advice***
- ✓ **Follow "You, Your Canoe and the Marine Environment"*****
- ✓ **See guidance on INNS and Safety on the Estuary**

*<https://thegreenblue.org.uk/you-your-boat/>

***www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/access-and-environment/environment-good-practice

Wildfowling

✓ **Most wildfowling is controlled by local clubs and associations that are affiliated to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)**

✓ **Follow the BASC Codes of Practice and club rules***

✓ **In severe weather, all shooting of waterbirds may be suspended in line with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee requirements** and BASC/ Club rules**

✓ **Check for landowner permission where required**

✓ **Wildfowling requires a consent from either Natural England or Natural Resources Wales**

✓ **Keep safe – wildfowling can be dangerous!**

- Always check the tide times before you leave - remember how quickly the tide moves in the Severn.
- Be aware of the mudflats – the risk of getting stuck is real!
- Ensure you keep together and bring a charged mobile phone.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.



- Go out with an experienced guide first.
- See guidance on Safety on the Estuary.

For more information and guidance contact

- Consortium of Severn Estuary Wildfowling Clubs
severnestuarywildfowlers@gmail.com
- South Wales Joint Council of Wildfowling Clubs
wentloogwildfowlers@gmail.com

*www.basc.org.uk/cop

**Scheme to reduce disturbance to waterfowl during severe winter weather' <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/severe-weather-scheme/>

Airborne Recreation

Includes activities like kite surfing and model aircraft flying. Drones are covered on the next page.

✓ **Protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance**

- Approach the estuary using established paths.
- Walk around saltmarsh and Sabellaria reefs (honeycomb tubeworm).
- Keep your distance from groups of birds.
- Keep to designated activity zones identified on information signs or by the Local Authority to avoid disturbing birds and habitats.

✓ **For your safety on the beach and at sea**

- Always wear appropriate protective clothing, depending on activity.
- Check local weather forecasts and ensure you have adequate skill to deal with conditions in the estuary.
- Fly or sail within your capabilities and only in winds you are comfortable in.
- Do not lay lines across the path of other beach users and never operate in crowded areas.



✓ **Observe local rules and treat other coastal users – particularly swimmers and children in the water - with respect**

✓ **Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly**

✓ **See guidance on Drones for No Fly Zones**

✓ **Check permissions - landowner permission and other consents may be required**

Drones

✓ Follow the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) "Dronecode"*

- Take time to understand the [CAA Drone and Model Aircraft Code](#) and take the [CAA Theory Test](#). You are legally responsible for every flight.
- Carry the documents for your class of drone and category of flight. Make sure that your drone is marked with the Operator ID and insured, as required by CAA rules.
- Keep your drone in sight at all times. It can be difficult to judge distance and keep track of it over the estuary. You must have a spotter if flying FPV (first-person view).
- Never fly a drone close to an airport, helicopters, aircraft or airfields.

✓ Protect wildlife by avoiding disturbance

- Keep your drone at a distance from groups of roosting, feeding or breeding birds to avoid putting birds to flight.
- Keep noise to a minimum, particularly in sheltered creeks and rivers where groups of birds are not easily spotted, and do not disturb animals grazing on farmland.
- When flying, walk around sensitive habitats such as saltmarsh and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm).
- Always check the tide times and beware of the Severn Estuary's quick changing tide.



✓ Existing [CAA](#) **Airspace Restricted Areas in the Severn Estuary include areas around Hinkley, Berkeley and Oldbury. You will require a National Air Traffic Service permission for Non Standard Flight to fly here.**

- Download the [CAA Drone Assist](#) app for further information on drone safety.
- ✓ **Drones with cameras should not be flown:**
 - Over 400 feet high, or
 - Within 50m of a person, vessel or structure.
 - Consider rights of privacy of any images you record during flight.
- ✓ **CAA permission is required for all commercial flights and anything deemed as value added.**
- ✓ **Take all of your litter home and dispose of it responsibly.**
- ✓ **For more information, see our guidance on Airborne Recreation.**

Field Study, Data Collection & Educational Fieldtrips



✓ **Protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance**

- Keep your distance from groups of birds.
- Approach the estuary using established paths.
- Respect the environment - keep to the permitted right of way where possible to avoid trampling of sensitive habitats such as saltmarsh and reefs of Sabellaria (honeycomb tubeworm).
- Take photos instead of removing nature as souvenirs.
- Leave animals and seaweeds where you find them.
- Always replace overturned rocks.

✓ **Check permissions - landowner permission and other consents may be required**

✓ **Follow your organisation's health and safety protocol for coastal fieldwork**

✓ **Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly**

✓ **Keep safe – you are responsible for your own safety:**

- Always check the tide times before you leave - remember how quickly the tide moves in the Severn.
- Be aware of the mudflats – the risk of getting stuck is real!
- Ensure you keep together and bring a charged mobile phone.
- Be aware of coastal hazards.
- See the Safety on the Estuary section.

Horse Riding



✓ **Protect wildlife and marine heritage by avoiding disturbance**

- Keep a good distance from groups of roosting, feeding or breeding birds, particularly at high tide.
- Keep to the designated bridleways, byways and roads to avoid disturbing wildlife and sensitive habitats, particularly saltmarsh and sand dunes.



✓ **Follow any local time and seasonal restrictions and regulations**

✓ **Take care when riding near other beach users and give them a wide berth if possible**

✓ **Follow the British Horse Society's code for riding responsibly and road safety***

✓ **Take all of your litter home and recycle or dispose of it responsibly**

Safety on the Estuary

Plan Ahead and Be Prepared!

✓ Check your tide times and weather forecast before you visit the coast*

- Remember how quickly the tide moves in the Severn.
- Keep safe on the mudflats – the risk of getting stuck is very real!
- Conditions can change rapidly, so don't be afraid to turn back.
- Be aware of strong currents.

✓ Always bring a charged mobile phone and let others know where you are and your expected return time

✓ Observe local beach safety information and byelaws

✓ Wear suitable clothing – it can be muddy and cold!

✓ Always wear a lifejacket or suitable buoyancy aid when on the water and make sure you have adequate skill and ability to deal with conditions in the Severn Estuary

✓ Check how to alert emergency services before you launch

- In an emergency phone 999/112 and ask for the 'Coastguard' or 'Police' if away from the immediate estuary.



*For tide times see: www.ukho.gov.uk/easytide

*For local weather see the Met Office website or use the App

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)



Invasive species are those that have been introduced into an environment outside their native country or natural habitat. INNS can out-compete and prey on native plants and animals, as well as clogging up boat engines, restricting waterways and spreading disease. To help minimise the damaging impact of these species follow the **Check, Clean, Dry** code:

✓ Check

- Check your boat, equipment and clothing for living plants and animals.
- Pay particular attention to areas that are damp or hard to inspect (e.g. seals of boots and seams of waders).

✓ Clean

- Clean and wash all equipment with freshwater (use hot water where possible) on site and anti-foul boats annually.
- Clean boots and any kit used (e.g. fishing nets) after being out on the estuary.
- Remove visible fouling and put it in the bin, not back in the water.
- Wash off your anchor and chain before leaving an anchorage.
- Use your boat to prevent fouling.

✓ Dry

- Drain water from every part that can hold water, including any that collects in the bilges.
- Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.
- Clothing and equipment should be thoroughly dried for as long as possible before it is used elsewhere.

What to do if you spot an INNS?

If you see or suspect the presence of an INNS, please take a photograph and record:

- 1) The **name** of the species
 - 2) The **date** of when you spotted it
 - 3) The **location** of where you found it
- INNS found in or near the estuary include zebra mussels, killer shrimp, Chinese mitten crab and Japanese knot weed. **Please report your sightings at:** www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/ enter-non-native-records

Seven Places to Visit on the Severn

- 1) Enjoy amazing wildlife up-close at WWT's Slimbridge Wetland Centre
- 2) For a wildlife haven on the edge of the city, visit the Newport Wetlands Reserve
- 3) Escape to Flatholm for a day of wilderness and explore its fantastic natural and cultural heritage
- 4) Watch the natural phenomena of the Severn Bore between Awre and Gloucester
- 5) Wander along the English coastline between the two Severn Bridges to spot the many species of waders and ducks found here
- 6) Explore a natural pier with dramatic cliffs at the National Trust's Brean Down
- 7) For a wild, wetland landscape visit WWT's Steart Marshes – it's one of the UK's largest wetland reserves

**Get involved –
play your part in
keeping the Severn
Estuary special**

- ✓ Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- ✓ Join Litter Free Coast & Sea Somerset's regular beach cleans
- ✓ Take part in a #2minutebeachclean: <https://beachclean.net/boardsmap>
- ✓ Become a volunteer with the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB or the National Trust
- ✓ Join the Marine Conservation Society's "Beachwatch" campaign: www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch



The Severn Estuary



Turn to the back page for details on the seven amazing places to visit on the Severn, and how to play your part in keeping our estuary special.

Photo credits: Natural Resources Wales, Azmath Jaleel, Adrian Plant, Severn Estuary Partnership, Nigel Phillips, Devon and Severn IFCA, Clevedon Sailing Club, Wentloog Wildfowlers, Luke Maggs, Island Board Shop, John Coleman, Ruth Livingstone, Adrian Plant.