

Habitats and Their Protection

The River Hamble supports a diverse range of environmentally significant features, including nutrient-rich intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh habitats that function as a natural form of coastal defence, fish nursery areas, and a wide variety of wildfowl. The river also contains areas of historical and archaeological interest, including recorded historic shipwrecks.

The River Hamble forms part of the wider Solent estuarine system, which is recognised at both national and international levels for its importance to breeding, overwintering, and migratory bird populations. The availability of suitable feeding and sheltering habitats within the river is fundamental to sustaining these bird assemblages, particularly during the winter months.

The extensive intertidal zone of the River Hamble comprises approximately 125 hectares of mudflats, 60 hectares of saltmarsh, and 60 hectares of coastal grazing marsh. A saline lagoon is present at the mouth of the river and benefits from international designation due to its ecological significance. The River Hamble contains some of the most extensive and well-developed examples of mature saltmarsh along the south coast.

Mudflat and saltmarsh habitats within the river provide essential feeding and resting areas for wildfowl and wading birds and support a diverse range of benthic fauna, including molluscs, crustaceans, and annelid species. The river and its adjoining habitats also support protected and notable species, including water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), and a range of important beetle, moth, and other invertebrate species.

Nature Conservation Designations

The River Hamble contains several areas designated for nature conservation due to the presence of important habitats, notable species, or significant populations of particular species. These designations recognise the ecological value of the river and its contribution to the wider Solent ecosystem.

Statutory monitoring and reporting on the condition of designated sites are undertaken by Natural England. This monitoring informs conservation objectives and management requirements associated with the designated areas.