



giving  
nature  
a home

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



# Sustainable Shores

We are calling for greater effort to restore and improve the UK's valuable coastal habitats for people and wildlife.

The RSPB has been reviewing the state of the UK's coastal habitats through our Sustainable Shores project: [rspb.org.uk/shores](https://rspb.org.uk/shores)

The headlines from the project are summarised below.

## The UK's shores are vital for people and wildlife

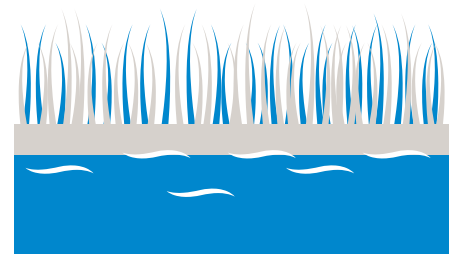
The UK's estuaries and coasts are incredibly valuable as a place to live, work, relax and play and for the wealth of wildlife they support. They help protect us from flooding; they lock away carbon; they support our fisheries and they attract millions of visitors. The value of the services provided by our coastal habitats is estimated at £48 billion.<sup>(2)</sup>

## But they're under threat – and disappearing

However, the coastal zone is in trouble. It is shrinking, and what habitat that remains is generally in a woeful condition. A 2013 assessment of the UK's internationally important coastal habitats found that none of them have a favourable conservation status.<sup>(3)</sup>

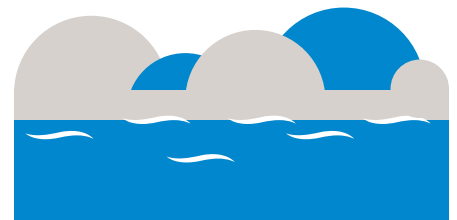
Stronger nature legislation, in particular the EU Nature Directives, has helped stem the tide of losses due to development. However, our coastal habitats remain very vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise. As sea levels rise in response to global warming, intertidal habitats like mudflats and saltmarshes can get squeezed against fixed flood defences ("coastal squeeze"). The latest predictions see us continuing to lose at least 60 hectares (ha) of intertidal habitat a year in the UK due to coastal squeeze, unless action is taken.

Since World War II  
the UK has lost:<sup>(1)</sup>



**8,000ha (15%)**

of UK saltmarsh



**16,000ha (18%)**

of our sand dunes



**5,000ha (46%)**

of our shingle habitat

1. Office for National Statistics (2016) *Scoping UK coastal margin ecosystem accounts*.  
2. UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) *The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report*.  
3. UK General Implementation Report. Annex A of the 2013 UK Article 17 EU Habitats Directive Report.

## What needs to be done?

Fortunately, the solutions are in our hands. Through more than 70 projects in the UK in the last 25 years<sup>(4)</sup> we have developed experience of creating coastal habitat. More than 2,500ha of habitat have been created through techniques such as managed realignment, of which around two thirds are intertidal saltmarshes and mudflats.

The RSPB, working with a range of partners including the Environment Agency, has been at the heart of this effort, helping to deliver and manage more than 33% of the coastal habitat created in the UK (some 880ha). As our experience has increased, so our projects have become larger, with schemes such as Medmerry and the Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project providing landscape-scale benefits for wildlife and people.

We know from the analysis and mapping undertaken as part of our Sustainable Shores project that there are more than enough places around the coast where we can replace what has been lost and will be lost in the future. We know what we need to do, where to do it, why and how. But we still haven't got close to replacing even 25% of the UK area of coastal habitat that has been lost since 1945, and we are struggling to keep up with what continues to be lost each year.

Crucially, the UK is also failing to implement its Shoreline Management Plan policies and to adapt our coast to climate change. This failure was highlighted in the Government's UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 in which flooding and coastal change risks to infrastructure, communities and businesses was identified as a top risk for the UK.

## What are we calling for?

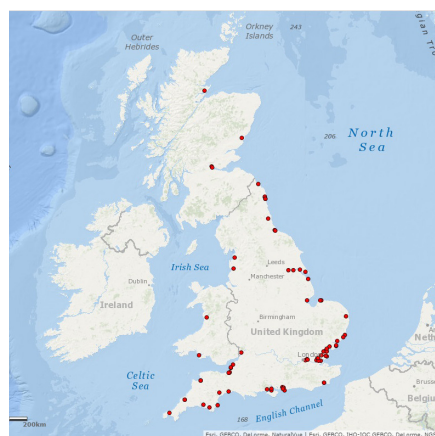
The RSPB will continue to work with partners to deliver schemes and manage sites that work for people and wildlife. Crucially, there also needs to be:

- Protection of the Nature Directives post-Brexit. They have been crucial in slowing the rate of loss due to coastal development and ensuring governments address the loss of protected coastal habitat to coastal squeeze.
- Clear milestones, responsibilities and funding for climate change adaptation on the coast through proper implementation of Shoreline Management Plan policies and National Adaptation Programmes.
- New National Habitat Creation Programmes in Scotland and Northern Ireland to address the impacts of coastal change, including the loss of protected habitat.
- More action from UK governments and environmental regulators on improving coastal habitat quality, including through encouraging measures such as the beneficial use of dredged material.
- Further exploration by multi-sector partnerships of innovative ways that coastal adaptation can be delivered and financed.



For further information on the RSPB Sustainable Shores project, please contact Nathan Richardson:  
[nathan.richardson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:nathan.richardson@rspb.org.uk)

4. ABPmer (2017) *UK Marine Habitat Creation Schemes – A summary of completed managed realignment and regulated tidal exchange projects (1991–2016)*. White Paper. Ref. 2781.



Completed coastal habitat creation schemes



Opportunities for future coastal habitat creation