

The Goodwin Sands Education Project

Wildlife on the Goodwin Sands

The largest seal colony in the Thames Estuary uses the Goodwin Sands as a resting or haul-out site; they swim all the way from the Thames to The Downs to have a snooze or sometimes, give birth. The Zoological Society of London's last survey counted about 700 grey and harbour seals resting on the sandbanks at low tide. When the harbour seals give birth on the Goodwins, it means that the pups have to learn to swim very quickly just a few hours after birth.



Unfortunately, the local fishermen don't like the seals very much as they eat the fish they are trying to catch. Popular fish are Dover sole, herring, seabass and skate. Whelks (a form of shellfish) are also a profitable catch.



In 2018 a large area of sea around and including the Goodwin Sands was designated a Marine Conservation Zone. Species that are to be protected are the *Sabellaria Spinulosa* or Ross worms and Blue mussels. Both of these make beds or reefs that smaller sea creatures can then live in sheltered from the action of the sea. This increases biodiversity which means that many different kinds of sea life can thrive.



The beautiful Thornback Ray is a Near Threatened species that can be found in the waters around the Goodwins. Closely related to sharks, they have oversized fins that act as underwater wings, making them glide gracefully through the water. They often spend the day buried in the sand.

The shipwrecks that litter the seabed provide great homes for sea creatures that wouldn't normally live there, such as lobsters and crabs. Fish also love swimming through them which is why if you see a moored fishing boat there is likely to be a shipwreck beneath it.

As well as being a home for seals and sea life, the Goodwins form a natural sea defence for the East Kent coast which is very vulnerable to erosion. The sandbanks absorb the energy from storm waves in the English Channel, so they are not so big and strong when they hit the beach. With rising sea levels and fiercer and more frequent storms, it is therefore very important that the height of the sandbanks is not lowered, which might potentially happen if people removed great quantities of sand for construction.



Oldstairs Beach, Kingsdown, Kent. Sixty years of change 1960s to 2023



