

## Location



## Introduction

Sweden is a large Nordic country in the north of Europe in the Baltic Sea. Sweden is bordered by Norway to the west and Finland on the north-east. It is also connected to Denmark by a bridge to the south. It has a long coastline on the east which runs the full length of the Gulf of Bothnia. Sweden has the greatest number of islands for one country in the world with over 267,000 identified islands, many of which are uninhabited. The highest concentration of islands can be found in the Stockholm Archipelago, near the capital Stockholm. The coastline is approximately 3,218 km and is varied given the large number of islands.

Sweden is temperate in the south with cold, cloudy winters and cool, partly cloudy summers. The northern part of Sweden is subarctic and as such experiences long, cold winters and short, cool summers.

## Regional Seas and Biogeography

Baltic Sea LME  
North Sea LME

## Habitats

- ➔ Rocky shorelines are the most widespread habitat on the coast in Sweden, found on each coastal side and in the numerous archipelagos.
- ➔ Marshlands can be found extensively in the Bothnian Bay and Sea, around the Stockholm archipelago. They are also found scattered throughout the Swedish coast.
- ➔ Coastal lagoons can be found scattered throughout the Swedish coast, but the most prominent area is in south Sweden in Skåne. They can also be found on the west coast in Kattegat and Skagerrak but not as widespread.
- ➔ Sandy beaches and dunes are most prominently found in the south of Sweden, in Skåne, Halland and Öland and Gotland.
- ➔ Archipelagos and islands are worth mentioning since the Swedish coast has hundreds of thousands of islands, and numerous archipelagos which can be significant for biodiversity.

## Biodiversity Hotspots

### ➔ National Parks

*Getterön* is a Nature Reserve, Ramsar Site, which has a lagoon, mudflats, salt-marsh meadows and reedbeds in the province of Halland on the west coast of Sweden. It is one of the most important resting and breeding places for waterfowl along the Swedish coast and is popular for bird watching. garganey (*Anas querquedula*), the bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and the Sandwich tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) are common species found here.

*Skånska Kattegat*, is a Nature Reserve, IBA, MPA and HELCOM protected area on the west coast of Sweden in a transition zone between the North Sea and Baltic Sea. It covers a large marine area with soft seabeds and corals underwater. It is a known area for harbour porpoises, both harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*).

*Fjord of Kungsbacka*, a nature reserve, Natura 2000 and IBA, has over 250 bird species and covers both the fjord estuary, islands and the water. It is an important stopover point for waterbirds numbering in their thousands such as common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) and red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*).

*Mellerstön* is a large island in the Piteå archipelago in the north of Sweden on the east coast. It is a Natura 2000 site and a Nature Reserve and a site of national importance for nature conservation. It is a natural wetland with rocky shores, mud flats and sand banks which are important feeding, staging and breeding grounds for waterbirds. The site is important for ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) northern pintail (*Anas acuta*). There are also a lot of ducks, geese and waders breeding in the site.

*Umeälvens delta* is a Natura 2000 site and a Nature Reserve in the norther of Sweden on the east coast. It is a large delta formed by the river Umeälv at the river outlet to the Gulf of Bothnia. The site features transition mires and wetlands, as well as important forest areas. There are about 100 different bird species, of which around 40 are wetland birds.

*Svenska Högarna-Nassa* covers a grouping of 4 groups of islands off the east coast which is classified as a Natura 2000 site, Nature Reserve and a sit of national importance for nature conservation. The site has around 400 small islands in total and is close to busy shipping lanes.

The archipelago is rich in stony reefs, rocky islands and islets, and narrow channels. There are more than 50 breeding species of birds, and the site is very important to some migrating and breeding waterbirds and Auks, including velvet scoter and ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). There are also many grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) on the site.

*Gotlands ostkust* is one of the largest islands in the Baltic Sea in the south east of Sweden. It is a designated Natura 2000 site, a national bird sanctuary and Nature Reserve. The eastern coast is also an IBA. The site has six subsites along the east coast of Gotland and has restricted access. There is a big diversity of marine and coastal wetlands and the shorelines are generally sandy, gravel or stones. The sites has numerous waders and Anatidae, including Bewick's swan (*Cygnus columbianus beqickii*) and migrating barnacle geese (*Branta leucopsis*). The area is of great importance to breeding, resting and staging water birds.

*Ölands ostkust* is in the south east Sweden and is a Natura 2000 site, a Nature Reserve, and a site of national importance for nature conservation. The site consists of three sub-sites on the island of Öland on the east coast of the island. The sites has shallow coastal waters, bays, sandbanks, beaches, wet calcareous meadows, and steppe-like dry meadows. The site has both harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*). The site is also important for nesting waterbirds and a variety of migrating birds, notably waders and raptors.

*Ottenby* is the southern tip of the island of Öland which is a Natura 2000 site, a Nature Reserve and a Bird Sanctuary. The site has sand and shingle beaches, sandbanks and small bays. The site is an important area for migrating and breeding birds, especially waders and waterfowl.

*Blekinge Skargard*, also a Natura 2000 Site and an IBA, contains three separate areas on the souh-east coast of Sweden which include coastal meadows, marshes, beaches and rocky shores. The sites can have up to 20,000 waterbirds at one time, especially ducks, gulls and cormorants.

*Falsterbo-Foteviken*, also a Natura 2000 Site, nature reserve and IBA, is a crucial site for the autumn migration of shorebirds and raptors and often supports over 280,000 waterbirds. It is a complex of shallow coastal waters, sandbanks and lagoons, some marshlands and meadows. It is one of the most important sites in all of Europe for these birds during migration with about 500 million birds leaving souther Sweden in Autmumn and this being one of the most important sites within that. It is also an important area for breeding harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) and the gray seal (*Halichoerus grypus*).

*Lundåkrabukten* on the west coast, also a Natura 2000 site, SPA and SAC, is a Ramsar Site within the Lundåkrabukten Nature Reserve which is smaller than the overall Reserve. The Ramsar site is the area that is the shallow bay, the shoreline and the river mouth. It is an important area for breeding waders such as little tern (*Sternula albifrons*), but also worth noting is that it is an important spawning area for the critically endangered European eel (*Anguilla Anguilla*).

*Träslövsläge-Morups Tånge* on the west coast covers flat, low lying sea shore meadows that are rare in Europe. It is an important habitat for staging and breeding waders, such as garganey (*Anas querquedula*), and common eider (*Somateria mollissima*).

*Nordre älvs estuarium* is a shallow marine bay at the mouth of the Nordre älv River in the west, with the site also covering part of the river itself. It is also a nature reserve, Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI. The site is highly productive, and therefore high numbers of waterbirds can be found there, such as the horned grebe, little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and greater scaup (*Aythya marila*) It is also an important site for the critically endangered eel (*Anguilla Anguilla*).

*Stigfjorden*, also a Nature Reserve, Natura 2000 Site, SPA and SCI, is a shallow marine coastal site between two large islands on the west coast of Sweden that does not ice over in winter due to the water flow. It therefore has one of the richest bird colonies on the coast for waterbirds such as velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), ruff

(*Philomachus pugnax*) and common eider (*Somateria mollissima*), amongst others.

## → IBAs

*Bank of Hoburg*, also a HELCOM protected area, an SPA and SCI, is an area of open sea over the submerged bank which during migration can have 100s of thousands of the endangered long-tailed duck.

*Northern Midsjö Bank*, als a HELCOM Protected area, SPA and SCI, is an area of open water just south of the Bank of Hoburg which also has endangered long-tailed duck.

*Archipelago and coastline of North-East Scania* is an IBA that covers smaller Natura 2000 sites, SPA and SCIs, as well as a nature reserve designation. It is in the south, and covers mostly marine areas but also coastal and terrestrial habitats. It has significant numbers of waterbirds, such as greylag goose (*Anser anser*) and bean goose (*Anser fabilis*).

*Lomma Bight*, also a KBA, is a bay area in the south west coast with sandy beaches as well as covering the surrounding marine area. It can have up to 50,000 waterbirds in winter, such as greylag goose (*Anser anser*) and barnacle goose (*Branta leucopsis*).

*Little Middelgrund*, also a KBA and HELCOM Protected Area, is a marine area off the west coast of Sweden in the transition zone between the Baltic and North Sea. The site can have high numbers of Black-legged kittiwake, razorbills (*Alca torda*), and common murre (*Uria aalge*) in the winter as feeding ground, each numbering in the 10s of thousands.

## → IMMAs

*Baltic proper IMMA* is on the east coast of Sweden and is designated due to it being the main hub for the Baltic Sea subspecies of harbour porpoise.

*Western Baltic IMMA* is on the west coast of Sweden is also significant for the harbour porpoise, but also harbour seals.

*Eastern North Sea and Southern Slopes of the Norwegian Trench Complex* is also on the west coast but more north than the Western Baltic IMMA and is designated because it is a productive area for harbour porpoises.

## At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

### → At risk birds

Considering Sweden's expansive coastline archipelagos, and being on the East Atlantic flyway, it has very high numbers of birds along its coastlines and marine waters. It is one of the most important countries for birds in Northern Europe, meaning that an oil spill could have significant impacts on birds, such as ducks, waders, seabirds, shorebirds and geese.

### → At risk reptiles

No know at risk marine reptiles

### → At risk mammals

Sweden has some populations of marine mammals that are regionally threatened as listed on the HELCOM Red List, although globally they are not threatened, such as harbour porpoise and ringed seal. Along the coast of Sweden, many seals can be found which could be a risk during an oil spill. There are also cetaceans, such as the minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*).

## Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

Marco Polo incident occurred in October 2023 when a TT-Line ferry grounded off the coast of Blekinge due to a navigation equipment malfunction and human error. There were two groundings, after the first, the ship continued for another 11 minutes and then grounded again on harder ground causing extensive damage to the hull and spilling heavy fuel oil into the sea and onto protected areas on the coastline causing significant damage to the environment. Hundreds of marine birds became covered in oiled with experts from the National

Association for Disaster Relief for Birds and Wildlife taking a leading role in the collection and rehabilitation of birds.

The Fu Shan Hai spill in 2003 occurred when the bulk carrier collided with the container ship Gdynia off Bornholm Island in Denmark. The bulk carrier was towed but sank before reaching a place of refuge, spilling 1,200 tonnes of oil onto the Swedish coast.

## **International and Regional Treaties and Agreements**

### **→ Oil spill and HNS Response**

- d CLC Convention 69
- CLC Protocol 76
- CLC Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 76
- FUND Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 2003
- d LLMC Convention 76
- LLMC Protocol 96
- OPRC Convention 90
- HNS Convention 96
- HNS PROT 2010
- OPRC\_HNS 2000
- BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

### **→ Marine Biodiversity Protection**

- Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA)
- Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)
- Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Bonn Agreement for Cooperation in dealing with pollution of the North Sea by oil and other harmful substances
- Copenhagen Agreement

## **Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response**

### **→ National Contingency Plan?**

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) has the primary responsibility for the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan as well as coordination with the local municipalities and procuring equipment, including wildlife equipment if it were to be bought.

### **→ Role of Competent National Authorities**

While the MSB is responsible for the overall national oil spill contingency plan, the Swedish Coast Guard is responsible for the at sea response and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has responsibility for environmental protection. Local municipalities are responsible for shoreline cleanup, which can be complex giving the extensive coastlines and high numbers of municipalities that could therefore be involved in a shoreline response. Local municipalities should have a local oil spill contingency plan.

## **Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response**

### **→ Formal guidelines?**

At the moment, there is no official national oiled wildlife response plan for Sweden. However, the current understanding at the national level is that hunters would be used to euthanise birds.

**→ Response objectives and strategy**

The overall objectives of the oil spill contingency plan are to ensure prevention and response to oil spills. Within that, minimising the impact on people, the environment and property is mentioned which broadly could cover oiled wildlife.

**→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

On the national level, the guidance is unclear on rehabilitation or euthanasia by hunting, but the latter seems like the preferred option. A grouping of some regions and MSB are considering producing guidelines for oiled wildlife rehabilitation, but these are guidelines rather than official policy.

**→ Impact assessment**

During an oiled wildlife incident, the local municipalities, of which there are hundreds in Sweden, would start with the impact assessment if it is a local incident. They could coordinate or ask for support from their region, or from the national level.

**→ Notification and early response**

The Swedish Coast Guard would be the notification point for an oil spill at sea. For wildlife, first notification and response would be at the municipal level, if it is local. If it is a larger incident, MSB would be the first notification point.

**→ Wildlife responders**

The Swedish Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (KFV) was founded with the primary objective for oiled wildlife and has maintained that role throughout its existence. As of 2025, it became an Affiliate Member of the EUROWA Network for mutual assistance for oiled wildlife response based on based practice guidelines. They have trained responders in oiled wildlife response based on their own training (not officially EUROWA trainings as yet).

In the Stockholm and Gothenburg area, there is a volunteer organisation called Swedish Animal Ambulance who would likely become involved in the rescue of oiled animals in an incident.

**→ Cooperation between stakeholders**

Sweden is a contracting party to the HELCOM, OSPAR Convention, and the Copenhagen Agreement between Nordic countries that focuses on response to marine pollution.

Sweden has a complicated multilateral system between municipalities, regions and the national level. The cooperation between municipalities and regions varies, especially considering the high number of both. Some regions are more aware of oiled wildlife issues and of KFV's work on oiled wildlife than others.

**→ Permanent facilities**

There are a number of wildlife rehabilitation facilities with capacity to care for up to 100 birds. Many of the groups work cooperatively within Sweden and have supported each other during spill or chronic oil responses.

**→ Current processes**

As mentioned above, a grouping of some regions and the MSB are working on producing guidelines for wildlife rehabilitation. It is unclear when this might be produced.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **➔ At risk birds**

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

Horned grebe / *Podiceps auratus* / VU / Resident / Breeding  
Velvet scoter / *Melanitta fusca* / VU / Resident / breeding  
Lesser white-fronted goose / *Anser erythropus* / VU / Migratory and resident (location depending) / Breeding  
Long-tailed duck / *Clangula hyemalis* / VU / Resident / breeding north only  
Common pochard / *Aythya ferina* / VU / Migratory Spring and Autumn / breeding  
Grey plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / Resident / non-breeding  
Broad-billed sandpiper / *Calidris falcinellus* / VU / Resident / Breeding  
Curlew sandpiper / *Calidris ferruginea* / VU / Resident / non-breeding  
Steller's eider / *Polysticta stelleri* / VU / Migratory in winter / non-breeding

### **➔ At risk reptiles**

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

### **➔ At risk mammals**

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**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

harbour porpoise / (*Phocoena phocoena*) / CR on HELCOM red list (LC globally) / Resident / breeding

Harbour seal / (*Phoca vitulina*) / VU on HELCOM red list (LC globally) / Resident / pupping

Baltic ringed seal / (*Pusa hispida botnica*) / VU on HELCOM red list (LC globally) / Resident / pupping