

## 28 Horse mussel beds

The horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* forms dense beds off the north and west of the British Isles, in water between 5 and 70 m deep. It is a common and widespread species but forms a distinct horse mussel biotope in some areas. The attachment threads of horse mussels bind the individuals together and to old shells and sediment, building the substrate up gradually and in some areas developing into reefs. The mussels filter plankton from the water and the waste may accumulate in the bed. This provides food for other animals; sometimes hundreds of species are found on dense mussel beds.

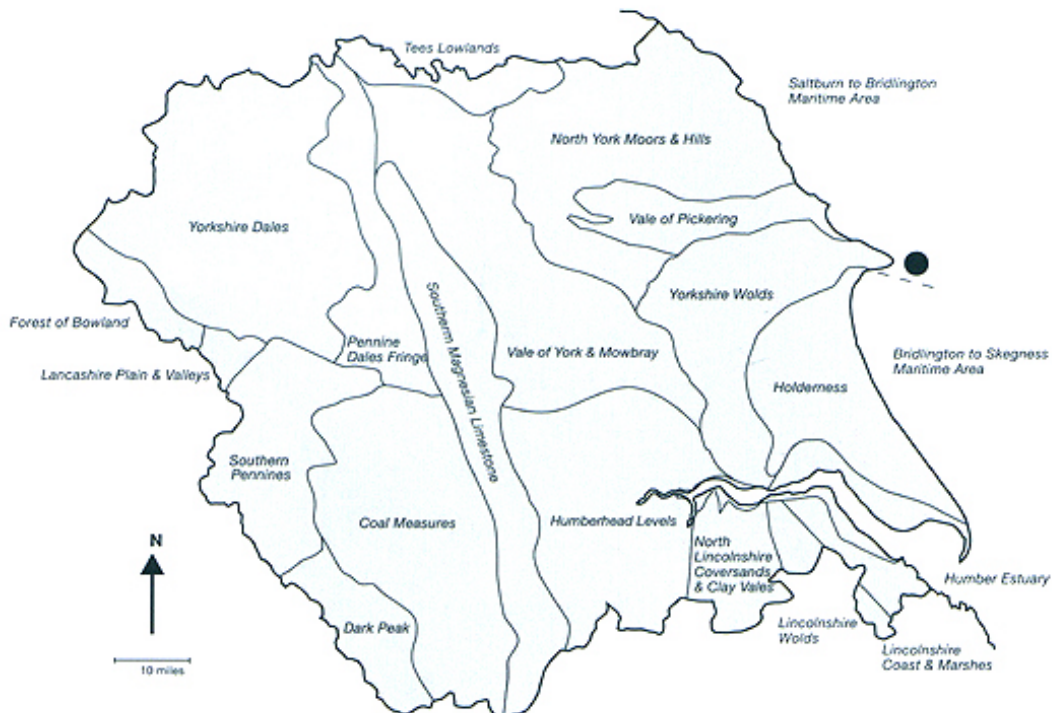
### Status

Horse mussels have been found in the Saltburn to Filey area, at Flamborough Head, on gravel south to the Humber and on muddy gravel in the Humber mouth. The particular biotope however, has only been noted east of Flamborough Head at 37 m depth, (TA 305711) on a plain of cobbles and pebbles exposed to strong tidal streams<sup>1</sup>. Though the species may be present south of the Humber on the east coast, the biotope is not.

### Threats

Fishing damages beds, particularly where scallops or queen scallops are trawled or dredged (queens are found off Flamborough Head), though horse mussels are rarely taken for food. Other developments such as aggregate extraction or cable laying will be likely to cause similar damage. Contaminants such as heavy metals are accumulated in spoil disposal areas but the effects of such pollution on the mussels is not known.

Map 31: Presence of horse mussel *Modiolus modiolus* beds shown by Natural Areas



● Location of site