the bigger picture ...

why is Rye Harbour special?

All 465ha of the nature reserve has formed over the last 700 years by the combined force of the wind and the sea pushing up great ridges of shingle. It has a variety of soils from marine clay to sand and shingle and a gradient of salinity from seawater to freshwater. This, along with varied land management has created a fascinating mosaic of habitats, many of which are scarce in Britain: vegetated shingle ridges, saline lagoons, saltmarsh, grazing marsh with ditches and ponds, gravel pits and reedbeds.

The nature reserve boasts more than 4,000 species of plants and animals, some of which are nationally rare and endangered, while some are declining elsewhere in Britain such as the water vole and the cuckoo.

No wonder it has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation, but perhaps what makes the nature reserve so special to the thousands of people that visit every year is the timeless beauty of its extraordinary landscape.

getting there ...

Rye Harbour nature reserve lies to the south of Rye and Winchelsea in Sussex. There are several entry points but the main one is in the village of Rye Harbour where there’s a large car park next to the Martello Tower – the nearest postcode for Sat Nav is TN31 7TX, the OS grid reference is TQ442189.

The railway station in Rye is just an 11 minute walk from the north part of the nature reserve near Brede Lock. Or there’s a regular bus service from Rye station to Rye Harbour village.

You can explore all of the reserve along a network of footpaths. A private tarmac road runs through the southern part of the reserve and the four bird-watching hides here are suitable for most wheelchairs. The northern part of the nature reserve, Castle Farm, is served by wide and grassy paths which are usually dry, and a fifth hide overlooks Castle Water - fabulous for ducks, especially in winter.

events and education

We run regular guided walks and family events that give you the opportunity to discover the wildlife and environment of the reserve with our experienced staff.

We encourage educational visits for all ages and we can tailor a visit to your requirements.

Find out much more by visiting: www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour

your guide to ...

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, Lime Kiln Cottage, Rye Harbour, East Sussex, TN31 7TX
Nature reserve office phone: 01797 227784
Sussex Wildlife Trust Registered Charity No. 207005

Events and education

Three formal and informal workshops are planned during the course of the year, with the potential to be extended to the whole of the reseve even further for wildlife.

The nature reserve was established in 1970 and improvements have been made since then to benefit the wildlife and enhance the site. The reserve has now been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the reserve even further for wildlife.

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breeding birds...

Many areas of the nature reserve are managed with grazing animals, otherwise it would quickly go to scrub and then woodland. We use some primitive breeds such as Herdwick sheep because they are good at browsing scrub and are hardy in our windswept and wet landscape. But we do leave some areas to scrub and trees for other wildlife.

reedbed creation...

Very few areas of this tall wetland grass survived extensive land drainage during the past 100 years. We created 20ha adjacent to a large gravel pit in 2005 which is now home to reedbed specialists bittern, marsh harrier, water rail, bearded tit, garganey and many insects.

fences...

Some of our fencing is electrified to reduce the losses of our ground nesting birds from foxes and badgers looking for a tasty egg supper at night. Other fencing is to allow our sheep and goats to manage the vegetation so that it remains suitable for our special wildlife.

saltmarsh recreation...

A national and local decline in this intertidal habitat has encouraged the recreation of this wetland by the Environment Agency as part of sea defence improvements. We worked together in 2011 to produce 20 hectares rich in plants, birds and the tiny animals they feed on, with up to 10,000 tiny shrimps in a square metre – great for avocets.

invertebrates...

In our scarce habitats we have more than 100 endangered invertebrates. Most of these are tiny and rarely seen, but have an important influence on our management. This large hairy caterpillar of the pale grass eggar moth is a rare species, which can often be seen crossing the road along the shore and provides a major food source for our cuckoos during May and June.

grazing...

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shingle flowers...

Living in this very harsh environment with little soil or fresh water, some species thrive among the pebbles: sea kale, sea pea, sea campion, viper’s bugloss, yellow horned-poppy and two very rare species – least lettuce and stinking hawksbeard.

yellow horned-poppy

take the trail...

Short route about 2 miles or 3½ kilometres: from the Rye Harbour car park - follow 1, 2, 3, 4

Long route about 5½ miles or 9 kilometres: follow 1, 2, then 5 and follow the numbers all the way round to 15 to rejoin the Rye Harbour Road

breeding birds...

With more than 90 species of birds nesting, the specialities here are little, common and Sandwich terns, avocet, redshank, lapwing, oystercatcher, and ringed and little ringed plovers, Mediterranean and common gulls, which all benefit from the protection of our fences.