



history ...

Around 140 million years ago, in the Cretaceous period when dinosaurs roamed, sandstone and mudstone beds were laid down in swamps to form the bedrock of this area. Two million years ago, when human-type or 'hominid' creatures were still very primitive and ape-like, gravel deposits were formed and these make up much of the surface we see here today.

These gravel and shingle deposits have been shifting ever since and continue to do so. Over the past thousand years seaside villages and towns have been washed away in storms or isolated inland as the shingle has built up and the coastline shifted further into the sea. For example Camber Castle, built to defend the coast by Henry VIII in 1542, had to be abandoned less than 100 years later because so much shingle had built up in front of it that its cannons could no longer reach out to sea.

But the shingle has had its uses, having been extracted in large quantities in the 20th century for building industries, leaving behind large water-filled lagoons which are perfect for bird life.

The nature reserve was established in 1970 by a group of local partners, and numerous improvements have been made since then to benefit the reserve even further for wildlife.

the bigger picture ...

There is no point in viewing nature reserves in isolation - otherwise they become little more than free-range zoos with all our wildlife packed into small areas, unable to expand and at severe risk of extinction.

That's why it's important to remember that Rye Harbour nature reserve is part of the much larger Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest. It's also connected to many other sites either along the coast, or through watercourses, even by features such as hedgerows and tree cover. Furthermore the nature reserve is recognised for its importance at a European scale, and so forms part of an international network of sites that is so important to migrating birds.

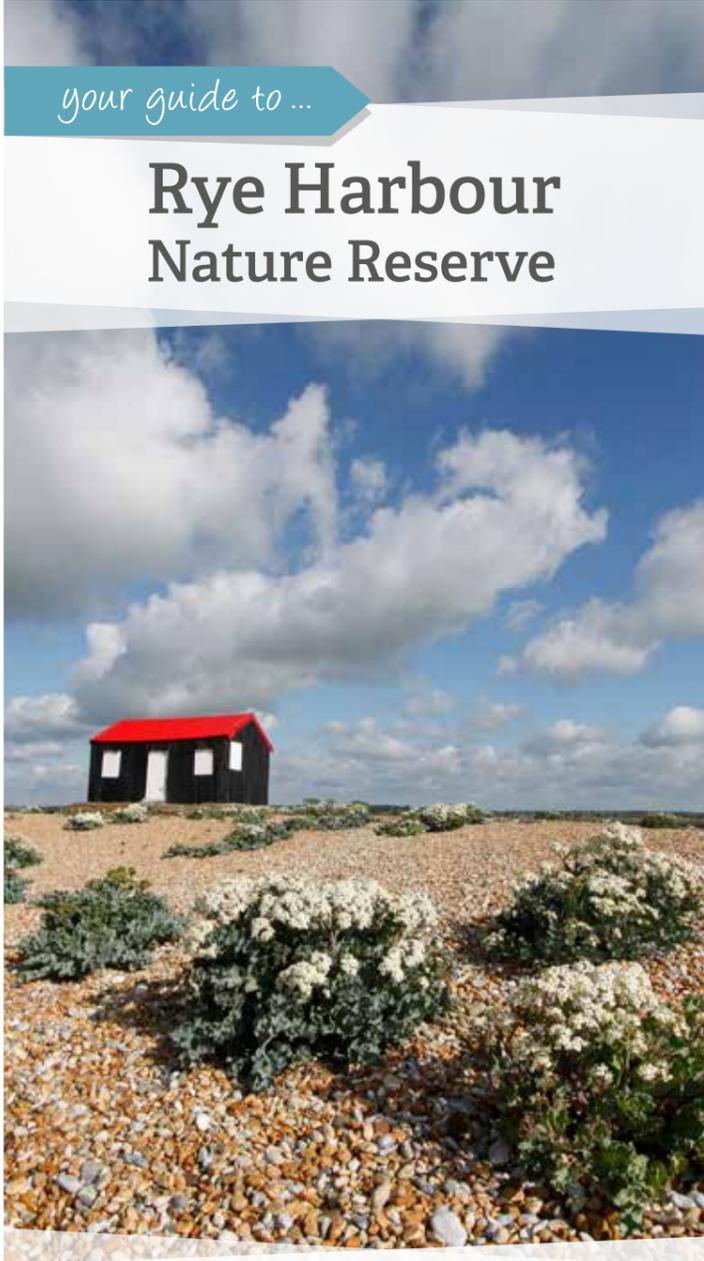
Managing such a large and important area can only be achieved in co-operation with other partner organisations. The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve play a major role in funding and voluntary support; the Environment Agency manage the Harbour and sea defences; English Heritage maintain the fabric of Camber Castle; and a management committee includes representatives from Sussex Ornithological Society, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, East Sussex County Council, Rother District Council, Icklesham Parish Council, Rye Town Council and independent landowners.

a vision for the future ...

Ever since the nature reserve was established there have been continual improvements to enhance the conditions for wildlife to thrive here. We've created reedbeds where bitterns fish and marsh harriers breed, saltmarsh where avocets raise their chicks, and built dozens of islands so terns and gulls can nest safely. We've also protected rare plants and created conditions for rare insects and other invertebrates to thrive - even leeches and tiny spiders that only live in shingle. We'll continue to make improvements to the nature reserve, for both wildlife and its human visitors, but we also need to think beyond the boundaries of the reserve itself.

Sussex Wildlife Trust has a 50 year history of working and campaigning to protect the wildlife of Sussex, for its own sake and for people to enjoy. It has a vision for the whole area that aims to encourage a better wildlife network that in turn provides a better countryside with more wildlife for you to enjoy.

Nature is not a luxury. It underpins our economy and social well-being and its natural processes give us clean water, food, flood protection and climate control. Sussex Wildlife Trust wants to see the natural areas of our towns and countryside thriving, full of flowers and alive with birdsong, wherever you live.



your guide to ...

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

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 TQ942189.

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 shingle and grassy paths which are usually dry, and a fifth hide overlooks Castle Water - fabulous for ducks, especially in winter.

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 reedbed.

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.

events and education ...

We run regular guided walks and family events that give you the opportunity to discover the wildlife and history of the area 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



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



grazing ...

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.

Herdwick sheep



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.

bittern



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.



oystercatcher on nest

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.



avocet

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



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.



pale grass eggar moth caterpillar

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.



common tern

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