

During the past 700 years this coastline has changed dramatically with shingle ridges shifting and reforming. A series of great storms around 1287 moved the river mouth 15km from New Romney to Rye and washed away the original town of Winchelsea which stood near the present day river mouth. This coast has been threatened by invasion during three periods: Tudor, Napoleonic and the Second World War. The military buildings constructed now mark the old shorelines: Camber Castle (500 years ago), Martello Towers (200 years ago) and Blockhouses (75 years ago). The sea defences have been developed and strengthened during the last 200 years, but as sea level rises, the land and its habitats will come under threat from flooding. The Environment Agency manages this coast by recycling shingle that accumulates at the river mouth by Longshore Drift, running it back westwards in trucks to protect the Pett Level sea wall. In 2005 a secondary sea-defence bank was constructed through the reserve to protect local villages and industry from flooding. It became clear during the 1960's that increasing pressure on the coast was threatening the nesting birds and other wildlife, so in 1970 a group of local partners came together to form the Local Nature Reserve on the land managed as a sea defence. In 1973 the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve was established and it now plays a major role in funding and voluntary support. In 2011 Sussex Wildlife Trust took on the management of the nature reserve from East Sussex County Council.

history ...

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.

events and education ...

Nature reserves do not exist in isolation – wildlife sites need to be “more, bigger, better and joined”. That's why it's important to remember that Rye Harbour Nature Reserve is part of the enormous Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest. This forms part of an international network that is so important to migrating birds – called Ramsar wetland sites and Natura 2000 sites.

the bigger picture ...

Ever since the nature reserve was established there has been steady improvement to enhance the conditions for wildlife to thrive here. We've created reedbeds where bitterns boom and marsh harriers hunt, saltmarsh where avocets raise their chicks, and islands where terns and gulls can nest safely. We've also protected rare plants and created conditions for rare insects and other invertebrates to live here. We'll continue to make improvements to the nature reserve, for both its wild and human visitors, but we need your support. 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. Please join us online at www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/make-a-difference/join The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve has been supporting the reserve for 43 years and it would not be the place it is without its 2,000 members. Please join us online at www.rhnfriends.co.uk

a vision for the future ...

why is Rye Harbour special?

All 475 hectares of the nature reserve has formed by the combined force of the wind and the sea pushing up great ridges of shingle. It has a fascinating mosaic of habitats, many of which are scarce in Britain: shingle ridges, saline lagoons, saltmarsh, grazing marsh with ditches, ponds, gravel pits and reedbed. The nature reserve has recorded more than 4,500 species of plants and animals. More than 300 species are nationally rare or endangered, including some that have declined 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, a Special Area of Conservation, a Natura 2000 site and a Ramsar wetland site.

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.

keep in touch ...

Find out much more by visiting:
www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour
Keep up-to-date with news and goings-on at Rye Harbour on our Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/RyeHarbourNR
Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, Lime Kiln Cottage,
Rye Harbour, East Sussex, TN31 7TU
Nature reserve office phone: **01797 2277 84**

your guide to ...

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve



Grazing...

Many areas of the nature reserve are managed with grazing animals, otherwise it would quickly go to scrub and then woodland. We use sheep and goats to maintain the grassland suitable for ground nesting and feeding birds. They stop it from turning to scrub and woodland, which are habitats we encourage elsewhere.

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

Shingle flowers...

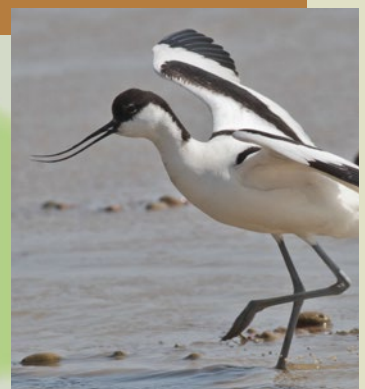
Living in this very harsh environment with little soil or fresh water, some species thrive among the pebbles: sea kale, sea pea, sea campion, viper's bugloss, yellow horned-poppy and two very rare species – least lettuce and stinking hawksbeard.



yellow horned-poppy

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.

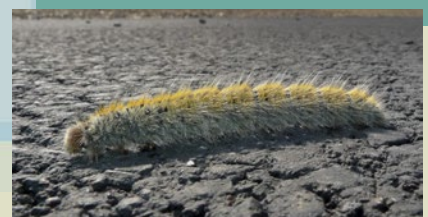


avocet



Invertebrates...

In our scarce habitats we have more than 200 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 trails...

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

Long trail 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