What makes Seaford Head so special?

Seaford Head is the best spot to enjoy the most iconic view in England - of the majestic Seven Sisters cliffs.

But there’s much more to it than that. It’s part of the Seaford Head to Beachy Head Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated for its outstanding biological and geological features.

The geology here is particularly unusual with a layer of sand covering much of the chalk cliffs. This results in rare communities of both chalk and acid-loving plants growing together, with rare butterflies, bees and other insects associated with them.

How to find us

Seaford Head lies just west of the Cuckmere estuary at the Seven Sisters Country Park. It can be accessed from the footpath which runs along the west side of the river (from the Cuckmere Inn pub). From the private road which runs south from the eastern end of Chyngton Way, or along the coastal path from Seaford Esplanade. If using a sal monarch or GPS, the nearest postcode for the car park is BN25 4JE, or N50.7629, E0.1322. The OS Grid Reference is TV504980.
Wet grassland

Wetland sections of the Local Nature Reserve include saltmarsh and the low-lying floodplain of the old river. In 1847 a canal was cut to transport water straight out to sea, leaving the meanders of the original course of the river isolated. These high grasslands are now no longer replenished with nutrient-laden silt from the river, but there are crakes which fill with fresh water so the ground remains damp. Redshank breed among tussocks of longer grass, and skylark and meadow pipit may also breed in the drier areas. These areas are managed by East Sussex County Council and the National Trust.

Chalk grassland

The thin, poor soils of well-managed chalk grassland can support an extraordinary number of species, as no one type of plant is able to grow strongly enough to dominate others. It is however, highly vulnerable to change, particularly if there is no grazing from either rabbits or livestock, or both. The soils become enriched with the remains of plant material if it is not grazed off or removed, than scrub begins to prosper, with more acid plant species and a cycle then develops which would ultimately end in woodland if there were no management. Chalk grassland covered up to 50% of the Downs up until the 1940s, but now so much sheep grazing ceased that this accounts for only 3-4% today. It is therefore an important habitat preserve. In the eastern sections of the Local Nature Reserve include saltmarsh and the low-lying floodplain of the old river. In 1847 a canal was cut to transport water straight out to sea, leaving the meanders of the original course of the river isolated. These high grasslands are now no longer replenished with nutrient-laden silt from the river, but there are crakes which fill with fresh water so the ground remains damp. Redshank breed among tussocks of longer grass, and skylark and meadow pipit may also breed in the drier areas. These areas are managed by East Sussex County Council and the National Trust.

Saltmarsh

Saltmarsh has a very high conservation value for the communities it supports. It is rich in invertebrates and is especially good for birds, but it is a fast disappearing habitat. Where coastal zones are ‘squashed’ between sea defences and land based developments, many habitats such as saltmarsh have become increasingly rare both nationally and internationally. The Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters Country Park have around 10% of the total saltmarsh area in East Sussex.

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Cliffs

The famous white cliffs of the south coast are formed of chalk laid down as sediment from the microscopic remains of plankton some 90 million years ago. In places you can also see bands of flint - probably formed from the remains of sponges at times when they were especially abundant in the warm seas of the time. In other spots, such as at Hope Gap, the red, sandy soils can clearly be seen above the chalk blown here by Arctic winds during the ice ages over 14,000 years ago. In summer you may see fulmars breeding on the cliffs - which although a kind of petrel, looks similar to a seagull with very stiff wings. Nettles and parsnips are also breed here, and numerous kinds of solitary bees and wasps, some of them nationally rare, excavate burrows in the soft rock.

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