



giving
nature
a home

Access Statement

Minsmere nature reserve

Introduction

Minsmere is the beating heart of Suffolk's wild coast. Acres of reedbed, wetland, beach and heathland combine as a refuge for iconic wildlife. It's the RSPB's 'ark' on the Suffolk coast: where rare species have recovered, where common species thrive, and where people and wildlife come face-to-face in a wild environment. The reserve is located in the beautiful landscape of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with leisurely walks. The site offers fantastic birdwatching, with hides which bring you close to avocets, waders and terns in spring and summer and hundreds of ducks in winter on the coastal lagoons known as the Scrape. The reedbeds at Island Mere host bittern and marsh harrier and elusive wildlife such as otters. It is also a haven for other wildlife, including a wealth of butterfly and dragonflies and spectacular red deer which gather to rut on the site in the autumn.

The visitor routes are largely on level ground or with shallow slopes. The visitor centre, which includes reception, shop, café and toilet facilities are all accessible on one level. Access from the Visitor Centre to the nature trails is via a gentle ramp. Some nature trails and hides are more accessible than others.

Further details about the reserve and what you can see and do can be found on our website at

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/m/minsmere/index.aspx>.

Pre Arrival

- For a map and directions of how to reach us please see the 'How to get here' section on our website, which has a link for sat navs. Alternatively, you can plan your journey by public transport or car using <https://www.google.co.uk/maps>; simply enter your postcode and ours, which is IP17 3BY to get directions.
- The nearest railway station is Darsham which is 5 miles/8km. The nearest scheduled bus stop is at Leiston which is 4 miles/6km away and offers an hourly service on the 64 route.

Accessible transport from Darsham or Saxmundham railway station or Leiston bus stop to the reserve can be booked in advance through Suffolk Link – Blyth, simply call 0845 604 1802 or 01728 833526 (see further details at www.suffolkonboard.com/cc

or <https://communities.suffolkonboard.com/my-area/suffolk-coastal/>)

- Footpaths from Leiston, via Eastbridge, allow access on foot to the reserve, but these include steeper gradients and uneven surfaces and are therefore not accessible to all.
- The Visitor Centre is open from 9am-5pm (4pm Nov-Jan) daily, except 25 and 26 December. The car park, hides and trails are open daily dawn till dusk, with out of hours access except 25 and 26 December.
- RSPB members and RSPB Wildlife Explorers can access the hides and trails for free. Admission charges for adults are £9.00, (registered carers with valid identification can enter free of charge), children £5.00, family offer: first child free, under 5s free, students £6.00.
- We welcome registered assistance dogs. All other dogs are not permitted on the trails or in the hides. Dogs on leads are welcome in the visitor centre and outside the cafe, with dog shaded parking available.

Car Parking Facilities and Arrival

- The car park is accessed via an entrance from Westleton (brown tourist signs from A12). The entrance road is 2 km (1.5 miles) and has several 'sleeping policemen'.
- The free car park has space for 243 cars and 2 coaches and is surfaced with pea gravel and has a level, even surface. It is not lit at night, but there is illumination provided by movement-activated lighting on the Visitor Centre, directed towards the car park.
- There are eight allocated parking spaces for blue-badge users (second bay on the right as you enter the car park), situated 80 m from the Visitor Centre entrance.
- There is a tarmac sloping 1:15 gradient path leading from the allocated parking bays to the visitor centre, without a handrail. There is also an alternative stepped route with a handrail.
- Visitors can be dropped off and collected from outside the visitor centre, where there is a level entry surface into the main building, although caution is needed as delivery vehicles and pedestrians use this area.
- The visitor centre is accessed via double doors which open outwards into a reception area. The clear door opening width is 1400mm/55". The reception area is permanently staffed during opening hours by RSPB personnel who can provide assistance if necessary.



Minsmere RSPB Arrival from car park to Visitor Centre

Visitor Centre – Main Entrance

- The reception area is on the ground floor and the tiled floor is step-free and level throughout, with a slight gradient in the corridor leading to the shop and reserve.
- It has information and displays about the reserve in clear print format and with good colour contrast.
- Reception is staffed during opening hours by friendly RSPB staff and volunteers, who can provide assistance if required.
- This is where admission charges to the reserve are payable at an information desk with a low counter area.
- It is possible to sit on the log wall outside reception and chairs can be provided in the reception area on request.
- There is a portable hearing loop.
- The entrance is well-glazed and illuminated, and has ceiling lights and fluorescent tube strip lights.

- Other items available to borrow are children's activity packs.
- Two mobility scooters are available to borrow from reception, this is popular, so advance booking is highly recommended, by telephoning 01728 648281. Full training is provided, you are required to pass a short test drive to ensure your safety, and the safety of our visitors when out on the trails. We ask for a donation for its maintenance. A wheelchair is also available for loan. These can be used during the visitor centre opening hours. Visitors are welcome to use their own wheelchair and mobility vehicles, but please note that some of the path surfaces may not be suitable for some vehicles and the lowest speed must be used when travelling through the visitor centre.
- We try to cater for requests for guided walks, if booked in advance, through our Hire-a-guide programme. Please phone 01728 648281 for details.

Shop

- There is a shop selling an extensive selection of bird food and bird care products, binoculars and telescopes, books, DVDs, clothing, children's products and gifts in the Visitor Centre, accessed via double doors from reception. The clear door opening width is 1550mm/61”.
- You can hire binoculars from £5 per pair for the day, simply ask a member of the retail team.
- The tiled floor is step-free and level throughout. There is sufficient aisle space to provide access through the shop, although space is limited in some places within the shop.
- The area is illuminated by natural lighting and ceiling spotlights and is well illuminated.
- Promotional DVDs are played, sometimes with sound, but without subtitles. There is no background music.

- Most goods are within easy reach, but some goods are on high shelves.
- There is a portable hearing loop, located at the retail till point.
- Please ask the staff for assistance if required.
- The exit to the reserve is via double doors from the shop with an opening width of 1530mm/60” across a level surface.



Minsmere RSPB Shop

Catering

- The café is accessed via a level surface from the shop.
- The tiled floor is step-free and level throughout.
- There are upright chairs without arms and the clear table height is 700mm/27.5”.
- The café is well-glazed and illuminated by natural light and ceiling spotlights.
- There is a mixture of self-service and staff assisted provision of food and drink.
- Staff are available to help if required.

- Additional seating is available outside, including three tables that are fully accessible.
- The nearest accessible toilet is in the shop, adjacent to the café.
- There is a bird feeding station outside the café.
- Where possible all food is locally sourced and the cafe has been awarded 'Bronze' by the Soil Association.
- We do provide for different dietary needs. Please ask a member of the catering team about ingredients if you have any food allergies. All allergy information is available via [What's in my dish](#).
- We do our best to cater for any dietary requirements; please contact us on 01728 648281 in advance, to check any specific requests you may have.
- The menu is available on a blackboard and staff can assist by reading out the menu if required.
- The crockery contrasts in colour with the bar seating surfaces (overlooking the feeders), and in the outside seating areas.

Public Toilets

- There are three accessible toilets at Minsmere: located in the shop, toilet block and Discovery Centre. All the accessible toilets have level entry with no steps. There is a shallow gradient ramp on rolled gravel to access the accessible toilet in the main external toilet block.
- The width of the door to the WCs is between 810-850mm/32-33.5".
- There is clear space to the right or left of each WC (when facing the WC) of between 750 - 920mm/29.5 - 36".
- The height of the WC from floor to seat varies between 450 - 480mm/18 - 19".
- There are horizontal and vertical grab rails in each accessible toilet.

- Guests are alerted to an emergency by the sound of an alarm and a flashing light.
- Guests can alert staff verbally if they need assistance.
- The toilets are well lit with fluorescent lighting.
- The floor is surfaced with tiles or non-slip vinyl.
- The sink has lever taps.
- There is a baby changing facility which is easy to use in all three accessible toilets.
- In the female toilets of the toilet block (far left cubical) and Discovery Centre (right cubical) have outward swinging doors giving easier access.

Education Centre / Classrooms

- Two classrooms are situated in the Discovery Centre. There is a level access via the main double door which has an opening width of 1260mm/49”.
- The layout is level throughout and the furniture consists of folding tables (clear height 725mm) and folding chairs without armrests.
- The floor surface is carpeted in the entrance lobby and marmoleum in the classroom.
- The area is lit by fluorescent and natural light and is well-illuminated.
- There is information displayed on the walls, in clear print format with good colour contrast, which can be viewed from a seated/child’s position, along with two interactive smart boards.
- There is a hearing loop in both classrooms.
- Toilet facilities are available in the Discovery Centre.

Nature Trails

- The reserve has a mix of different paths, both flat and undulating, where walks can be enjoyed. Some nature trails

and hides are more accessible than others. There are regular benches on many parts of the trails.

- Access from the Visitor Centre to the nature trails is down a gentle ramp or via a short series of three steps with hand rails.
- There are four main routes that are more suitable for all users, but please be aware that all of these routes include sections with less-improved surfaces that may not be suitable for some vehicles.
- The path from the visitor centre to the sea viewpoint takes in North Hide after 320 m/1050 ft (10 - 15 minutes to walk). This is a mixture of surfaces including tarmac, boardwalk (with anti-slip netting), rolled gravel and 'natural' surface. This route is level apart from one gentle ramp. There are two benches along this route. North Hide is accessible. North Hide to the sea viewpoint is 660 m/2,165 ft of rolled gravel and natural surfaces and is reasonably suitable for access, taking 15 - 20 minutes to walk.
- The path from the Visitor Centre to the Wildlife Lookout is 405m/1,330 ft of tarmac and rolled gravel on a level surface and takes 15 minutes to walk. This route is reasonably accessible, although can be muddy after heavy rain. South Hide is a further 415m/1,360ft along this path and takes 10 minutes to walk from Wildlife Lookout. Flooding events can cause deterioration in the surface of some paths, making access more difficult. We are working to improve this route. Wildlife Lookout and South Hide are both accessible via a dog-leg concrete ramp with hand rail.
- The path from the Visitor Centre to the Wild Zone and Wildwood Adventure is 190m/610 ft and is 5 minutes to walk. This route is fully accessible and includes access to a number of interactive interpretive facilities for family and young audiences.
- Island Mere is most easily accessible from a car parking lay-by opposite Scotts Hall Holiday Cottage, from this point the path is 325m/1,065ft (10 minutes) on rolled gravel, with a gentle incline on a boardwalk, with ridged anti-slip surface, to the hide. The hide has one lower viewing slot.
- All trails are clearly signposted with finger posts and trail maps are located at decision points along the route with clear print

and colour contrast. These maps can be viewed from a seated position.

- Seating is available at every hide and at intervals of approx. every 100 - 200m/328 - 656 ft on the more accessible trails. On the less accessible trails the distance between seating can extend for 800m/ 2,625ft. Wooden bench seats both with and without back support and arms is provided.
- A few permanent and a few seasonal interpretation boards are provided along the trails, with easy to read print and large illustrations. Most are easily read from a seated position.
- Accessible trails are wide enough for users to pass each other (except for the short ramp to Island Mere).
- Staff and volunteers guide the visitor routes and hides, and may be available to provide assistance and information
- Trail maps are available from reception and can be downloaded from the website <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/reserves/minsmere-trail-guide.pdf> before a visit.

Picnic area

- There is one picnic area 170m/ 550 ft or approx. a 10 minute walk from the Visitor Centre where visitors may eat refreshments that they bring with them to site.
- This includes an accessible picnic table.
- Food and drink is available purchase at the café, where additional seating is available outside, including three tables that are accessible.

Viewing Facilities

- There are seven hides and a viewing platform along the trails on the reserve
- There is level or ramped entry into four of the hides (North, South, Wildlife Lookout and Island Mere).
- The doors to all hides are between 850 - 940mm/33.5 – 37” wide, relatively easy to open with a lever handle, although some doors open outwards, so some users may require assistance.

- Three hides have stepped entry. East hide has 14 steps and one landing and an opening gate that is 920mm/36" wide , Bittern hide has 70 steps (with four landings) and Canopy hide has 46 steps (with three landings).
- All the hides have glazed viewing flaps that are relatively easy to open and secure. All the hides with level or ramped entry have some low windows e.g. 935mm/37" from the floor, allowing viewing from a seated position, that are easy to open.
- The viewing platform has 16 steps and a landing for entry.
- All the hides, except Island Mere have fixed bench seating, except in the location of the low viewing slots. Island Mere has a variety of moveable bench, stool and seats available. The North, East, and South hides and Wildlife Lookout are on two levels, with stepped access to the upper level.
- There are information boards in all the hides except Canopy. All information is in clear print format and with good colour contrast. The information boards are non-reflective.



Internal view of Island Mere hide

Additional Information

- All of our staff receive regular training that includes disability awareness training.
- There RSPCA have advised us not to offer shaded dog parking to visitors due to the risk of dogs dying in hot cars. Water bowls for dogs are provided at the Visitor Centre.
- Clear signage is used throughout the reserve.
- We are grateful to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and for the opportunity to feature and present at the Inclusive Heritage Conference <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/news-features/inclusive-heritage-conference>, Essex and Suffolk Water, the Waste Recycling Group through Suffolk Environmental Trust, Suffolk Coastal District Council via their Economic Development Support Fund and a European Regional Development Fund grant from the EU through their Interreg IV A 2Seas programme for funding recent improvements to access and visitor facilities at Minsmere through the Discover Nature project.

Future Plans

- Our regular maintenance takes into account changes in accessibility of the site and these will be rectified as soon as possible.
- In partnership with Waveney Bird Club we are assessing the feasibility of an accessible for all trail to East hide. This has been delayed due to the Covid 19 pandemic.