

10. Minsmere - Walberswick

Geographical Coordinates 52°17'N 1°37'E

Area 2,004ha

Location On the coast, approximately 20km south of the town of Lowestoft, in the county of Suffolk, eastern England.

Date of Ramsar Designation Original designation 5 January 1976; site extended from 1,697ha on 19 May 1992.

Other International Designations Special Protection Area under EC Directive 79/409.

National Designations National Nature Reserve^P (NNR); Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Environmentally Sensitive Area^P (ESA); Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); Heritage Coast^P.

Principal Features A composite site, encompassing two discrete areas of a mosaic of coastal habitats, including shingle beaches, dunes, estuarine mudflats, grazing marshes, lagoons, reedbeds and heathland. The northern area, around Walberswick, incorporates marshes in the valley of the River Blyth, whilst Minsmere, to the south, features a mosaic of lagoons, islands and extensive reedbeds which originally developed on grazing land flooded as a war-time defence measure in 1940. Westwood Marshes, part of the Walberswick complex, support the largest continuous stand of reedbed in England and Wales, and are managed as a National Nature Reserve by English Nature. Minsmere is now a flagship reserve of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) with a well-developed system of trails and hides. The National Trust owns and manages another area. The site supports an outstanding diversity of breeding birds, including a number of nationally rare species. Especially notable are * *Botaurus stellaris* (5 "booming" males), *Circus aeruginosus* (15 breeding females), *Recurvirostra avosetta* (47 pairs), *Sterna albifrons* (32 pairs), *Caprimulgus europaeus* (24 pairs) and *Panurus biarmicus* (c.50 pairs). The site is of national importance for a range of wintering water birds. Other features of interest include rare species of marshland flora and insect fauna. (1a,2a,2c,3b)

*All figures refer to 1990.

Conservation Issues The Countryside Stewardship scheme (see UK introductory section) is active in the area. English Nature has management agreements and leases with a number of landowners. The site requires and receives intensive management in order to maintain its values (this is particularly true of the heathland and reedbed areas). However, it remains very vulnerable to damage from external forces, including ground water abstraction, coastal erosion and salt water incursion due to sea-level rise, pollution from sewage treatment works and increasingly high numbers of visitors to the area.