Accessibility Guide for RSPB Minsmere Nature Reserve

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Welcome

Minsmere is the beating heart of Suffolk's wild coast. It's the RSPB's 'ark' on the Suffolk coast: where rare species have recovered, common species thrive, and people and wildlife come face-to-face in a wild environment. The reserve is located within the Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape, with leisurely walks. The site offers fantastic birdwatching, with hides that 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.

Watch the video: RSPB Minsmere accessibility

At a Glance

Level Access

- There is level access from the main entrance to:

  - Dining Tables
  - Visitor Centre Reception
  - Visitor Centre toilets
  - Visitor Centre Shop
  - Discovery Centre WildZone
- There is level access from the car park to:
  - Beach
  - Discovery Centre picnic area
- Some of the hide entrances have level access.

Hearing

- The fire alarm has flashing lights.
- We have a fixed hearing loop in the Reception Area.
- We have a portable hearing loop located in the Shop.

Visual

- Glass doors and full-height windows have contrast markings.
- The walls and the doors have high colour contrast.
- The menu is in large print.
- We have displayed information in large print.

General

- We have a complimentary ticket policy for personal assistants.
- There are two public toilets for disabled visitors.

Getting here

RSPB Minsmere
Sheepwash Lane
Saxmundham
IP17 3BY

What3Words: deep.showering.bombshell

Travel by public transport

- You can get to RSPB Minsmere Nature Reserve by bus and train.
- The nearest scheduled bus stop is on Main Street in Leiston. Which is 4.1 miles / 6.4 km away. They offer an hourly service on the 64 route.
- The nearest train station is Darsham. The train station is 5.4 miles / 8.7 km from RSPB Minsmere Nature Reserve. Trains run regularly between Ipswich and Lowestoft. Please check with Greater Anglia train services for information about times and if bikes can be transported.
- Accessible transport from Darsham or Saxmundham railway station or Leiston bus stop to the reserve can be booked a week in advance through Coastal Accessible Transport Services - C.A.T.S. Simply call 01728 635938 or visit their website https://communities.suffolkonboard.com to book your spot.

Travel by taxi

- You can get a taxi with Coastal Accessible Transport Services - C.A.T.S by calling 01728 635938.
- You can get a taxi with A2b Taxis by calling 01728 633003.
- You can get a taxi with Darsham Cars Taxi Service by calling 01728 668039.
- Please contact the visitor centre on 01728 648281 for further advice about visiting the reserve by public transport or private hire.

Parking

- We have a car park. There are accessible parking spaces. The parking is less than 50 metres from the main entrance. Parking is free.
- There is a drop-off point at the main entrance. The drop-off point has a dropped kerb.
- From the car park to the entrance, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp.
- The path is sloped.
- The route is 1200mm wide, or more.
- Please contact the visitor centre on 01728 648281 before your visit so that we know of any support you require to access the reserve. Three mobility scooters are available to hire, booking is essential.
- Watch the video: RSPB Minsmere accessibility

wheelchair user inside Island Mere hide

Approach to Island Mere hide showing the gentle slope of the ramp

Mobility scooter and visitors on Access for All Path to East Hide

Three mobility scooters that are available for hire

Arrival

Path to main entrance

- From the street to the main entrance, there is level access.
- There is a permanent ramp.
- The path is 1200mm wide, or more.
- The path is sloped.

Main entrance

- The main entrance has level access.
- The door is 1400mm wide.
- The main door is side hung and manual.
- The reception area is permanently staffed during opening hours by RSPB personnel who can assist if necessary. There is a doorbell to call for assistance if required.

View of the Visitor Centre from the outside

Ramped footpath from the carpark to the Visitor Centre

Getting around inside

Visual Impairment - General Information

- We have contrast markings on all glass doors, contrast markings on all full-height windows and high colour contrast between walls and doorframes.

Ticket/ information desk

Visitor Centre Reception

- From the main entrance to the desk, there is level access. The route is 1400mm wide, or more.
- The door is 1400mm wide, or more.
- The desk has a low section.

Things to See and Do

- We have a complimentary ticket policy for personal assistants.
- We have displayed information in large print.

Public toilet

Visitor Centre toilets

- There are two public toilets for disabled visitors.
- From the main entrance to the public toilet, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp.
- The route is 1400mm wide, or more.
- The toilet door is 850mm wide.
- The direction of transfer on to the toilet is to the left.
- There is 750mm at the side of the toilet. There is 920mm in front of the toilet. The toilet seat is 450mm high. The toilets have handrails.

Shop

Visitor Centre Shop

- From the main entrance to the shop, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The route is 1550mm wide, or more. The door is 1550mm wide.

Place to eat and drink

Visitor Centre Cafe

- From the main entrance to the dining area, there is level access. The route is 1550mm wide, or more. The door is 1550mm wide.
- To get to a table, there are no steps.
- The menu is offered in large print.
- If you need table service, staff can help you.
- The route through the dining area is 800mm wide, or more.
- There is no background music.
- The tables and plates have high colour contrast.
- We cater for sugar-free (diabetic), vegetarian, gluten-free (coeliacs), lactose-free (dairy-free), nut-free, low fat and vegan specific diets.

Getting around outside

Designated Walking Trail

Coast Trail

- The trail is 3400metres long. Some of the trail has a loose surface. From our East Hide to the Sluice is beach and shingle, which is an uneven surface. The trail is sloped. The trail has seats. There are bird hides along the trail.
- A boardwalk from North Wall to East Hide and an extension to East Hide was built in December 2022. This has made East Hide more accessible for wheelchair and mobility scooter users and families with pushchairs.

Mobility scooter user and two visitors using the boardwalk

Access for all boardwalk path from North Wall to East Hide

Designated Walking Trail

Island Mere Trail

- The trail is 2400metres long. Some of the trail has a loose surface, tree roots, adverse camber and narrow sections of path and the trail is sloped in parts. The trail has seats. There are bird hides along the trail.

- If wheelchair and mobility users want to visit Island Mere Hide, the best way to do this is to park their car in the accessible parking bays located opposite Scotts Hall (https://goo.gl/maps/Cf96B4En3hm58tLZ7), as the path is more even from here than following the Island Mere Trail from Bittern Hide.

Island Mere Hide with ramp

Island Mere hides ramp with hide in the background

Bittern hide showing the 32 steps

North Hide

- At the hide entrance, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The door is 850mm wide.
- There are low windows in the hide with space for wheelchairs.

Bittern Hide

- The hide entrance has 32 steps. There is no lift and no ramp.

Wildlife Lookout

- At the hide entrance, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The door is 850mm wide.
- There are low windows in the hide with space for wheelchairs.

Island Mere

- At the hide entrance, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The door is 940mm wide.
- There are low windows in the hide with space for wheelchairs.

South Hide

- At the hide entrance, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The door is 850mm wide.
- There are low windows in the hide with space for wheelchairs.

Canopy Hide

- The hide entrance has 46 steps. There is no lift and no ramp.

East Hide

- At the main hide entrance, there is level access with no steps.
- The secondary hide entrance from the beach involves 14 steps. There is no lift and no ramp.
- The hide has two decks. The upper deck can only be accessed via 10 steps (located outside the hide) or 8 steps (located inside the hide). There is no lift and no ramp.

- There are low windows in the hide with space for wheelchairs. This space also has a knee-hole allowing users to make use of the shelf to support elbows or use a hide clamp for optics.

Public Viewpoint

- The hide entrance has 11 steps up from the beach and 4 down to the platform. There is no lift and no ramp.

Beach

- The beach access point is 660 meters from the nearest car park.
- From the nearest car park to the beach, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. There is a portable ramp. The path is 1400mm wide, or more.
- The entrance is 1200mm wide.
- We advise wheelchair and mobility scooter users not to access the beach as the sand and shingle make the route inaccessible. With the installation of the Access for All path from North Wall to East Hide, wheelchair and mobility scooter users have access to East Hide without having to access the beach.

Steps up to public hide accessed from the beach

Picnic Area

Discovery Centre picnic area

- From the car park to the picnic area, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The path is 1400mm wide, or more.
- The entrance is 2000mm wide.
- Some tables have space for wheelchair users. You can bring your own food to the picnic area.
- We have several benches located along our trails and footpaths.

Bench located along the Coastal Trail

Two benches located by the Sluice along the Coastal Trail

Discovery Centre WildZone

- From the main entrance to this area, there is level access. There is a permanent ramp. The route is 1400mm wide, or more. The entrance is 2000mm wide.
- WildZone is a play area for children and where we often run events such as Bird-ringing demonstrations, specialist workshops and talks. There is an accessible toilet within the building when events are taking place.

Customer care support

Accessibility equipment

- We have a fixed hearing loop in the Reception Area and a portable hearing loop in the Shop.
- We have three electric mobility scooters available to hire from the visitor centre. Seats are adjustable and able to recline, full instructions for use will be given by staff at the Visitor Centre. Booking in advance is advised on 01728 648281 as they are popular.
- The main car park has grass areas between each bay which assistance dogs may use as a toilet area. We do not have any dog bins on site, however a

general waste bin can be found outside of the visitor centre, to the right. It is advised that you double bag when using a general waste bin.

- We have our own scooters available to hire but unfortunately, we do not have the capacity for visitors to charge their own scooters.

Emergency evacuation procedures

- We have emergency evacuation procedures for disabled visitors.
- The fire alarm has flashing lights.

Customer care support

- All staff have disability awareness training.
- We have information in large print.
- We have other services for people with accessibility requirements.
- A volunteer guide can be booked in advance to assist individuals or family groups with exploring Minsmere. Booking in advance is essential. There is a fee for this service and can be discussed with the staff over the phone, by email (minsmere@rspb.org.uk) or in person.

Guide last updated: 30/06/26