

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1
on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008
at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2021

Annual reports should describe the changes that have taken place since the previous year in dynamic terms of management and function and not be limited to basic data. Any new text or map introducing a change in the situation of the area should be attached to the annual report.

State: **United Kingdom**

Name of the area: **Minsmere**

2021, the second year since the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

Central authority concerned:

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Authority responsible for its management:

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¹ As amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2014)2 on 2 July 2014 at the 1204th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.
Internet : <http://www.coe.int/cm>

1. **Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

With regard to the project of third reactor at the Sizewell nuclear power plant (project Sizewell C), carry out a proper Strategic Environment Assessment and an Environment Impact Assessment according to international standards; the results of the assessments should ensure that the construction of the new reactor will not be at the detriment of the Minsmere Nature Reserve. EDF Energy submitted their planning application for this project in June 2020. RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust submitted concerns to the Planning Inspectorate that the environmental assessment may not be adequate following the pre-application information we had received. The application was accepted for Examination. RSPB registered as an interested party for the Examination Process, submitted our relevant representation outlining our concerns and played a very active role in the Examination, working closely with Suffolk Wildlife Trust. The six-month Examination ended on October 14, 2021. Deadline for Planning Inspectorate to submit recommendation is January 14, 2022, with the Secretary of State's decision due three months from that date. RSPB continued to work with partners and the developer to seek to resolve the issues. This did substantially improve the approach to environmental mitigation. However, we believe that on current evidence the proposal could be to the detriment of the protected sites at Minsmere and beyond and should not proceed. Significant concerns were raised by a number of stakeholders, including the County Council, Natural England, Environment Agency and constituency Member of Parliament.

2. **Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. **control, wherever possible, the invasion of bracken with mechanical means, as opposed to the use of herbicides; in cases of restoration of big areas, the use of chemical products should be limited to the minimum possible extent and a careful record of this practice should be kept in order to assess and cope with possible undesirable side effects; specific scientific research on this issue should be carried out;** Chemical control of bracken was carried out in July of this year. This was carried out under a special one-year licence for the product. No mechanical control was undertaken. Treatment in this and previous years has brought bracken under control, but continued management will be required.

2. **pursue efforts to mitigate the effect of the rise in the sea level; explore the possibility of restoring the lost habitats in other parts of the reserve; envisage compensatory measures; carefully monitor indicative plant and fauna species and duly register and scientifically characterise the changes observed;** The Minsmere Coastal and Climate Change Adaptation Plan progressed. This project is to develop a strategic plan for managing coastal and climate change at RSPB Minsmere. It will incorporate planned adaptation of habitats and species, as well as visitor infrastructure. Planned further workshops with attendees from the Environment Agency, Natural England, Local Government, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, National Trust, the Internal Drainage Board and local landowners to seek their views on our developing Vision for Minsmere were not possible because of Covid-19. We plan to resurrect these workshops in 2022. We continue to liaise with the EA re maintenance of the major water control infrastructure.

3. **continue the land purchase policy; in the absence of opportunities to acquire new plots, establish long-term agreements with the landowners of selected areas to improve their contribution to biodiversity conservation and/or restoration;** There were no appropriate land purchase opportunities this year. Landowner advice on neighbouring land has continued for priority species: turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), stone curlew (*Burhinus oedipnemus*). We continued discussions with Forest England regarding RSPB management of the adjacent Dunwich Forest and how this can be expanded.

4. **maintain the surveillance of alien species of flora, especially controlling and managing the pirri-pirri bur (*Acaena novae-zelandiae*) and pursue the control of the American mink (*Mustela vison*).** Spraying to control pirri-pirri bur was undertaken this year. Due to the uneven ground, it was not possible to engage a contractor to boom spray compartments 69, 51 and 60, so these were sprayed using a small boom on a tractor driven by one of our staff team. These were compartments with significant infestation and where mechanical spraying from a tractor was most practicable. Staff undertook control by manual weeding in public areas of the reserve. Mink rafts were again deployed on the Scrape, along with trail cameras, and a "Remoti" mink trap was placed in the main reedbed - no signs of Mink presence were observed. Control for both these non-native invasive species will continue.

3. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

The Minsmere red deer control project continued, though no deer control was carried out in the period covered by this report. Impact assessment has shown that deer continue to make significant use of the wetland areas. Based on further impact assessment, we intend to cull around 100 red deer from the reserve in winter 2021-22, mainly in reedbed areas.

Further work tree felling on the Heathland Restoration Project (HRP) was undertaken. A small number of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*) were removed from heath areas by contractors and reserve staff. Open patches have been created within the heather for nesting nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Systematic nightjar monitoring revealed 16 chirring males at Minsmere, including some on areas previously cleared as part of the HRP.

Work on the Scrape included weeding islands, control of mare's tail with salt water and the usual post breeding season vegetation control by mechanical means and grazing. Water level control on the Scrape was back to normal after the interruption by Covid-19. Predation of nesting birds remains an issue and significant effort was put into nestcam footage scrutiny and recording of predation without providing much illumination on this issue.

Monitoring of turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur* territories was delivered. Unfortunately, there were no records of breeding attempts on the reserve. The final year of the national project to test potential turtle dove seed mixtures, in which a series of Spring-sown plots were established to complement last year's Autumn plots, was also delayed by Covid and was delivered in 2021, though we have not yet seen the results. Likewise, monitoring of nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* territories was undertaken and 24 territories were recorded on the reserve.

Sixteen stone-curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus* plots were maintained. Of these eight were used by nesting pairs. Nine chicks were fledged from nests (11 breeding pairs) on the reserve.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* productivity on the Scrape remains poor with avian predation the main influencing factor. Accommodating a successful gull and tern colony and a successful avocet colony in the same small area is increasingly difficult. 23 avocet chicks (from 89 nests) fledged. Minsmere recorded 33 Sandwich tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* adults on nests which saw three chicks fledged. Further thought is being given to a wider strategy approach that ensures that provision for breeding avocets, gulls and terns is accommodated across the wider coast and Minsmere supports the development of a sustainable breeding population throughout the area.

There remains a need to develop a programme of appropriate annual re-investment in the visitor infrastructure to ensure that the quality of the offer for visitors is maintained and annual engagement and income targets are met. This has been a challenging year for the visitor side of the 'business', though visitor numbers have been incredibly pleasing since the reserve re-opened.

4. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

No additional land purchases or boundary changes this year.

5. Other information: List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

Visitor numbers for the period April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 were not recorded to enable reporting in a meaningful way, due to Covid-19. The reserve closed on March 23, 2020 and remained closed for several months. On re-opening, all reserve facilities were closed, so for several months the reserve had no staff or volunteers in reception functions, in a position to record visitor figures. All visitor recording had reverted back to normal by April 1st, 2021 and we will therefore have comparable figures for future years.

Acknowledgement of the European Diploma award was included in the Reserve Leaflet which is normally given to all visitors to the site. This was suspended at the outbreak of Covid-19 to prevent the unnecessary handling of paper. We have yet to determine whether we will go back to paper in due course or rely on mobile devices. We would ideally like to make greater use of QR codes alongside mobile devices but are still restricted by the lack of mobile coverage on-site.

The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e. year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

- 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

- 7.1. Cultural heritage
 - 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage
- 7.2. Socio-economic context
 - 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

8. Education and scientific interest

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy
 - 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
 - 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
 - 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)
- 8.2. Scientific research
 - 8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
 - 8.2.2. Scientific publications

9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
- 9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

- 10.1. Improvements made
 - 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
 - 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
 - 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
 - 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
 - 10.1.5. Waste management
 - 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems
- 10.2. Management
 - 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
 - 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
 - 10.2.3. Internal policing measures
 - 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas