

**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 .2023

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**

2023, the fourth year since the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

Central authority concerned:

Name: The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Address: The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL

Tel: 00 44 1767 680551

Fax:

e-mail:

www: www.rspb.org.uk

Authority responsible for its management:

Name: Nick Forster

Address: RSPB Minsmere Nature Reserve, Westleton, Saxmundham, IP17 3BY

Tel: 00 44 1728 648085

Fax:

e-mail: nick.forster@rspb.org.uk

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

State:

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 for a third reactor at the Sizewell nuclear power plant (project Sizewell C), carry out a proper Strategic Environmental Assessment and an Environmental Impact Assessment according to international standards; the results of these assessments should ensure that the construction of the new reactor will not be to the detriment of the Minsmere Nature Reserve.

A Judicial Review has just been held to review the lawfulness of the decision to approve the application on the basis that the issue of the supply of potable water for construction and running of the Power station was not considered during the Examination. The finding of the Review is not yet known.

The environmental assessment for the potable water supply has not been undertaken and therefore the potential impacts (including those on Minsmere) have yet to be assessed.

Preliminary works have been undertaken under separate planning applications (e.g. creation of marsh harrier habitat) which could compromise the link between the environmental assessment and the compensation required. We continue to engage with the developer and statutory agencies to seek to ensure this does not happen.

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 this year using Asulox. No mechanical control was undertaken. Treatment in previous years has brought bracken under control, but continued management will be required. It appears that Asulox will not be available in future years as the UK licence holder has decided there is not a business case for production. The RSPB is undertaking a major review of chemical use throughout its operations and the Minsmere team will be participating in workshop to explore other options for the control of bracken.

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. In the last year we have opened a boardwalk to East Hide. This is intended to benefit access during surge tide periods and also reduce footfall on the shingle vegetation as that feature rolls landward (as well as improving accessibility to the hide for people with mobility issues). 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 remain on hold. We plan to resurrect these workshops in 2024. 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*) and Stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedipnemus*). Discussions with Forest England regarding RSPB management of the adjacent Dunwich Forest and how this can be expanded proved fruitful and funding has been acquired from Natural England to begin restoration of two further areas of previously-felled plantation to heathland and scrub habitats.

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 is not possible to engage a contractor to boom spray compartments 69, 51 and 60, so these were again 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 spot treatment with knapsack sprayers and 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. Further 'Remoti' traps have been procured. Control for both these non-native invasive species will continue. It is now believed that Mink has been eradicated from Suffolk.

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, with a cull of 77 deer carried out in winter 2022-23. 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, mainly in reedbed areas, co-ordinating our efforts with neighbouring landowners.

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 19 chirring males at Minsmere (the highest count since 2005), including some on areas previously cleared as part of the HRP.

Work on the Scrape included major re-profiling, supported by LIFE funds, through the LIFE on the Edge programme, creating islands and more varied water depths, alongside improvements to water control structures on East Scrape. Weeding islands, control of Mare's Tail with salt water and the usual post breeding season vegetation control by mechanical means and grazing were carried out. Water level control on the Scrape was difficult due to drought conditions in the summer. Predation of nesting birds remains an issue and significant effort was put into scrutiny and recording of predation without providing much illumination on this issue.

Monitoring of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* territories was delivered. There were no records of a male holding a breeding territory on the reserve. Work with landowners to encourage this species saw some success locally to the Minsmere.

Monitoring of nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* territories was undertaken and 27 territories were recorded on the reserve, which was above target.

Sixteen stone-curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus* plots were maintained. Of these nine were used by nesting pairs. Five chicks were fledged from nests (from a record 15 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. Seventeen avocet chicks (from 106 nests) fledged. Minsmere recorded no Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* adults on nests. 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. The fully accessible path to our East Hide, which has also been enlarged and made more accessible proved very popular with visitors. The reserve again achieved 100% score for our team of staff and volunteers Visit England, recognising the high-quality welcome.

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 2022 to March 31 2023 were 75,935. This compares with 82,743 for the previous year. This was a disappointing decline. On a positive note, trading through our shop and café was very strong and we recruited record numbers of new members on-site during the year.

Acknowledgement of the European Diploma award was included in the Reserve Leaflet. Distribution was suspended at the outbreak of Covid-19 to prevent the unnecessary handling of paper. We have yet to switch back, asking visitors to rely on pictures of trail maps on mobile devices. We are likely to produce a new leaflet in 2024. We would also like to make greater use of QR codes alongside mobile devices but are still restricted by the lack of mobile coverage on-site.

Avian Flu was present on the reserve throughout this reporting year. 416 dead birds were recorded, though this is likely to be only a small part of the mortality which occurred. The bulk of the dead birds were recorded in the first quarter of the reporting period: species impacted were mainly gulls and terns. A small number of corpses were tested on behalf of DEFRA and all tested positive for H5N1 High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza virus. The overall number of birds on the Scrape was reduced during the breeding season. We suspect this was because of large-scale mortality on the wintering grounds.

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

We continue to appreciate the interest and offer of support on the Sizewell C development from the CoE, confirmed by the correspondence earlier in the year on this matter, and we will keep the Council informed should more support be required.