

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2019)5
on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 september 2019
at the 1352th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2025

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

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

2025, the sixth year since the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

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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 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; The consent given by the UK Government to the Developer to proceed with the construction of a further two reactors at Sizewell was the subject of two Judicial Reviews brought by local pressure groups. Neither of these was successful and the Developer has commenced construction. The Final Funding Decision was made, with the UK Government committing several £Bn to the project. We continue to work with the developer and statutory agencies to seek to ensure that potential environmental impacts on Minsmere are appropriately managed.

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;

Minimal chemical control of bracken was carried out this year. The only supplier of Asulox in the UK has decided there is not a business case for production of this chemical. Small areas were weed-wiped or knapsack sprayed with Glyphosate. No mechanical control was undertaken. Treatment in previous years has brought bracken under control, but continued management will be required. The RSPB is undertaking a major review of chemical use throughout its operations and the Minsmere team will be participating in workshops 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. We are engaged with an Adaptive Delivery Plan Pilot study with Natural England and a gravel barrier study with British Geographical Study and workshops with stakeholders were held in 2025. The National Trust have agreed to further meetings to develop plans for realignment at North Marsh. 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 land owners 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 oedicnemus*). Partnership with Forest England regarding RSPB management of the adjacent Dunwich Forest expanded with funding from Natural England enabling delivery of the second year of a two-year restoration of 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*).

Knapsack spraying to control Pirri-pirri Bur was undertaken this year. 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. Further 'Remoti' traps have been procured. Control for both these non-native invasive species will continue. There was a credible sighting of a Mink further south in Suffolk in 2024 but none since.

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 (*Cervus elaphus*) control project continued, with a cull of 60 deer carried out in winter 2023-24. This was again below target (100), though control was co-ordinated effectively with our neighbouring landowners to the north and south of the Reserve.

Further work on the Heathland Restoration Project (HRP) was undertaken mainly removal of young Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*). A small number of Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) were removed from other heath areas by contractors and reserve staff. Drought conditions in recent years have made the heathland much more open which has helped nesting Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Systematic Nightjar monitoring revealed 26 chirring males at Minsmere (the second highest count since 2005), including some on areas previously cleared as part of the HRP.

Previous work on the Scrape supported by LIFE funds, through the LIFE on the Edge programme, included major re-profiling, creating islands and more varied water depths, alongside improvements to water control structures on East Scrape. Water level control on the Scrape has been greatly improved because of the works through LIFE funds completed during 2024. 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. Predation of nesting birds remains an issue and further significant effort was put into scrutiny and recording of predation.

Monitoring of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* territories was delivered. A single male was recorded holding a breeding territory on the reserve. Work with landowners to encourage this species saw some success locally to the Minsmere reserve.

Monitoring of Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* territories was undertaken and 33 territories were recorded on the reserve, which was a decline on the previous year.

Sixteen stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* plots were maintained. Eight pairs nested on the reserve, fledging eight chicks.

The reserve had record numbers of male Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in the spring, with up to 25 males observed – however only seventeen males graduated to full booming.

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. While there were 112 nesting pairs, for the second year running there were no avocet chicks fledged. Minsmere recorded 293 Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* nests, with 205 chicks fledged – this was the highest number fledged since 1974. 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. SZC Co have provided a resilience fund to mitigate the impacts of Sizewell C construction activity on visitors to the reserve, and this will be deployed to enhance visitor infrastructure and engagement. The reserve again achieved 100% score for our team of staff and volunteers and was awarded a Gold Award for the quality of the welcome provided

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.

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.

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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

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