

**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 2024

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:

Central authority concerned:

Name: The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

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Tel: 00 44 1767 680551

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Authority responsible for its management:

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

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 has been the subject of two Judicial Reviews brought by local pressure groups. Neither of these has been successful and the Developer is currently undertaken very significant enabling works. While a Final Funding Decision has yet to be made, the UK Government has committed several £B 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;**

No 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. 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. The boardwalk to East Hide opened in 2023 benefited access during a single surge tide during 2024. We are engaged with an Adaptive Delivery Plan Pilot study with Natural England and a gravel barrier study with British Geographical Study and plan to resurrect workshops with stakeholders in 2025. 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 oedipnemos*). Partnership with Forest England regarding RSPB management of the adjacent Dunwich Forest expanded with funding from Natural England enabling delivery of the first 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*).**

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. There was a credible sighting of a Mink further south in Suffolk in 2024.

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 71 deer carried out in winter 2023-24. This was below target (100), largely due to prolonged flooding in the main area for control. 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. Drought conditions in recent years have made the heathland much more open which has helped nesting Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Systematic Nightjar monitoring revealed 30 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 storm flooding in autumn 2023 but has been greatly improved because of the works through LIFE funds completed during 2024. 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. For the second year running, 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 reserve.

Monitoring of nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* territories was undertaken and 37 territories were recorded on the reserve, which was the highest number since 2006.

Sixteen stone-curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus* plots were maintained. Of these six were used by nesting pairs. Three chicks were fledged from nests on the reserve.

The reserve had record numbers of breeding Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* with fourteen nesting females, following high water levels over winter and into early spring?

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. No avocet chicks fledged from 135 nests. Minsmere recorded 160 Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* nests, but no 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. 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 84,229. This compares with 75,935 for the previous year. This was a pleasing increase. Alongside this, 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 will be producing a new leaflet in 2025, alongside a refresh of all signage on the reserve.

Avian Flu was present on the reserve throughout this reporting year. The number of dead birds was much reduced from the previous year. The overall numbers of birds on The Scrape were lower, presumably because of HPAI.

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 behaviour (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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