



Wye

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Wye NNR

Wye National Nature Reserve (NNR) is one of the best places in the country to enjoy the outdoors and experience spectacular wildlife. Most of the Reserve is owned by Natural England and managed for wildlife and visitors. A small section of the Reserve is owned by Imperial College.

NNRs offer a first-hand experience of England's special and diverse wildlife. They safeguard nationally important species and habitats, so that they can be enjoyed and studied now and in the future.



© Natural England / Dave Rogers

Wye NNR



© Natural England / Emma Griffiths

Flower rich grassland

What's special about Wye NNR?

Wye NNR covers 134 hectares of dramatic chalk downland, woodland and scrub grassland. The Reserve's inspiring landscape has some outstanding features, such as the Devil's Kneading Trough, one of several coombes (steep-sided dry valleys) found in the area. The tops of the chalk hills offer breathtaking views that are some of the best in Kent and the Reserve's panoramic viewpoint sculpture will help you identify the landmarks before you.

The extensive chalk grassland is one of the best examples of this important habitat in Kent. It is covered in wildflowers and supports several rare plant species, including rare and beautiful orchids such as the late and early spider orchids. In turn, the variety of plant life supports a vast amount of invertebrates, including scarce butterfly species such as the chalkhill blue and the Adonis blue, which have secured the site's European protection.

History

Fossilised sharks teeth have been found here on Wye Downs. They are a reminder that this area of Kent was covered with sea water 85 million years ago when the chalk of the North Downs was formed from the compressed remains of billions of small sea creatures from this time.

The coombes in the area, such as the Devil's Kneading Trough, were created towards the end of the last ice age, between 9000 – 8000 BC. During this period of intense freezing and thawing of the chalk surface, torrents of water from melted snow and ice flowed down the slopes, carving out the chalk and forming the coombes. You can find a 3D tactile sculpture of the Devil's Kneading Trough near the coach park.

The site has been used since prehistoric times and there is evidence that the land was cultivated during the mid-Neolithic period (around 3000 BC). The intriguing ridges on Broad Downs are known as terracettes and are thought to have been formed by sheep walking along the hillsides as they grazed.

Wye NNR was used for military training during the First and Second World Wars. Evidence of rifle and artillery practice has been found on Broad Downs, and there is evidence of a shooting range in the bottom of the Kneading Trough.

The site became a nature reserve in 1961 when a local nature enthusiast realised the importance of the site for the species it supported and wanted to ensure that it was protected.

Health and the natural environment

NNRs are among the best places to get out and about in the natural environment and experience nature. Medical evidence shows that contact with the natural environment improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease and helps people recover from illness. This evidence also shows that experiencing nature in the outdoors can help tackle childhood obesity, coronary heart disease, stress and mental health problems.

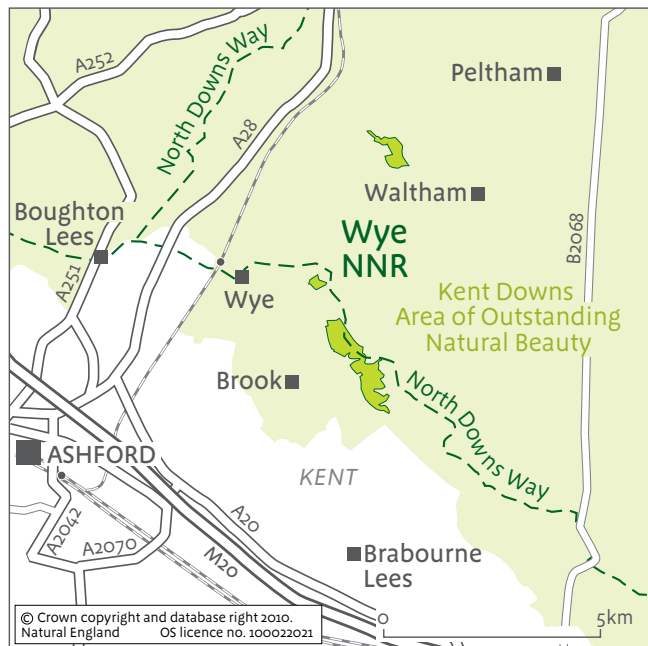
The hour-long, self-guided nature trail at Wye NNR will take you around the wildlife hotspots, different habitats and the most stunning views that the area has to offer. The nature trail panels along the route will provide a further insight into the wonderful landscapes and nature. You can read the spotter's guide in the walker's shelter near the coachpark to help you identify the wildlife you see.

If you would like a detailed audio tour of the NNR you can download an audio guide for the nature trail from: www.naturalengland.org.uk/wildside



Getting healthy at Wye NNR

Getting to the Reserve and parking



Green travel

Please think about the environmental impact of your travel choices. Information on green travel to this Reserve is available on our website:

www.naturalengland.org.uk/wildside

Parking

There is a car park near the Devil's Kneading Trough restaurant and another across the road from the restaurant, close to one of the NNR entrances.

To access the car and coach park take the Hastingleigh Road out of Wye, heading towards Hastingleigh.

On-site facilities

There are no toilet facilities at the Wye NNR. Public toilets are available in the town of Wye, opposite the parish church.

The fields at the top of the NNR may be accessible to those with limited mobility but owing to the steep gradient of much of the Reserve, other parts are not accessible for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility.

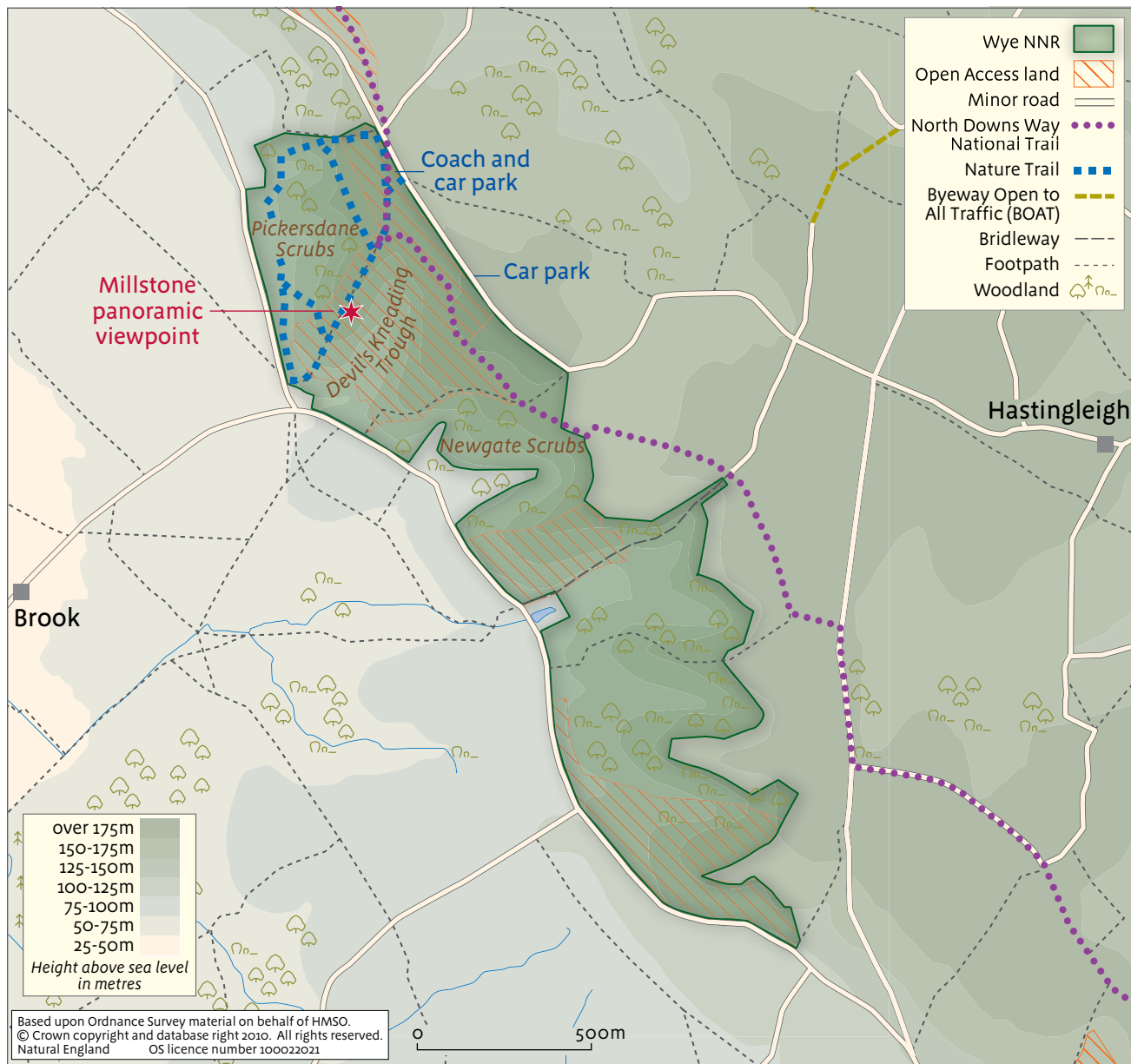
Further information

An education pack, podcasts of current topics and a self guided trail with activity sheets for children can be found online at:

www.naturalengland.org/wildside



The Devil's Kneading Trough



Grassland

The extensive chalk grassland is very important for the protection of moths and butterflies that make this area special, including the chalkhill blue, Adonis blue, silver spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy butterflies. It is important for its rich mixture of wildflowers that thrive in the chalk soil, and for reptiles such as adders, grass snakes, slow worms and the common lizard.

There are approximately 20 different species of orchid to be found across the Reserve. These include the pyramidal orchid, the lady orchid and the rare late and early spider orchids. In just one square metre of short turf, you may find 40 different plant species. The Reserve supports 400 kinds of wildflowers including horseshoe vetch, cowslip and marjoram.



Pyramidal orchids

© Natural England / Dave Rogers



Chalkhill blue

© Natural England / Dave Rogers

Chalkhill blue

The graceful flight of the chalkhill blue butterfly is an inspiring sight. It lives exclusively in chalk grassland where it feeds on horseshoe vetch. It has a special relationship with the yellow meadow ants that inhabit the chalk grassland – the chalkhill blue's larvae excrete a scent that attracts the ants, the ants are drawn to the lava and they protect them until they can mature to caterpillars.

Woodland

The woodland areas of the Reserve contain a variety of trees such as common beech, ash, yew and English oak and in many places have a thick under storey of hazel, providing a home for the sleepy hazel dormouse.

The hazel trees were planted in the 17th century as their cobnuts were an important food source for people as well as animals. The hazel is traditionally managed by coppicing (cutting a tree down to just above ground level). This is good for wildlife because light can reach the floor encouraging new growth and producing varied habitats and resources for wildlife. Harvested hazel coppice rods are used to make wattle hurdles for fencing, tools, domestic utensils and for many other purposes.

Within the woods, at the shrub layer, you can find field maple, wild cherry, wych elm and whitebeam. The ground vegetation is dominated by bluebells, dogs mercury, wood anemone,

bramble and colonies of green hellebore. The food and shelter that the woodland provides is important for birds and several species are regularly spotted here, including hawfinch, lesser-spotted woodpecker and nightingale. The woodland is also home to mammals such as rabbits, badgers, mice and voles.



© Natural England / Emma Griffiths

View from Wye NNR



©Sussex Wildlife Trust / Heather Angel

Hazel Dormouse

Hazel Dormouse

Also known as the common dormouse this little creature is highly specialised for life in hazel woodland. It is predominantly nocturnal and has a reputation for being quite lazy... for a mouse.

However, it needs the energy rich hazel leaves and nuts for bursts of energy to escape the woodland predators of the night such as owls and foxes. It hibernates throughout the winter under a blanket of hazel leaves.



© Natural England / Emma Griffiths

Volunteers clearing scrub

Scrub

The chalk scrub is rich in plant species such as hawthorn, wayfaring tree, wild privet, and traveller's joy and is important for all sorts of wildlife, including the nightingale, but it does spread rapidly. By removing the encroaching scrub we ensure that the grassland is not overwhelmed and that orchid and invertebrate habitats remain in good condition.

Scrub clearance is an ongoing activity which maintains the downland's condition, but this can be tricky as a lot of the scrub is on the steep slopes which means it needs to be cleared by hand.

Nightingale

The distinct fluty warbling song of the secretive nightingale can be heard throughout the spring and summer at Wye NNR where it thrives in the dense scrub and coppiced woodland.



© RSPB-images.com / David Tipling

Nightingale

Getting involved at Wye NNR

Wye NNR offers community groups and community members a venue for free guided walks, informal education activities and facilitated visits for schools. A number of events and practical hands-on activities take place to enable a wide range of people to reconnect with their natural heritage, details of which can be found on the Natural England website.

Volunteers are always welcome to help manage habitats, improve access and help at events on the Reserve. To find out about how you can get involved please email:

joanna.carter@naturalengland.org.uk

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

For further information please contact the NNR team:

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~~Tel: 0300 060 0371~~ 0300 060 3900

Front cover image: Painter at Wye NNR

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Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

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