



Stodmarsh

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve



© Natural England/Ron Poulter

Pond dipping platform

Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve (NNR) is one of the best places in the country to enjoy the outdoors and experience spectacular wildlife. It is owned by Natural England and managed for wildlife and visitors.

NNRs give you a first-hand experience of England's special and diverse wildlife, while they safeguard nationally-important species and habitats so they can be enjoyed and studied now and in the future. Stodmarsh NNR is a 'living laboratory' where Natural England staff and volunteers carry out monitoring work, and students and universities undertake research.

The nature trails across the Reserve will help you get the most from your visit and take you past wildlife hotspots. You could bring a pair of binoculars to get a close-up view of the wildfowl from our bird hides, and you will be able to find out more about the special nature and places at this site from the interpretation panels. All these features, along with easy access routes, are marked on the map in this leaflet.



What's special about Stodmarsh?



© Dave Rogers

Stodmarsh NNR covers a square mile of internationally-important reed beds, fens, ditches, wet grassland and open water, which provide an ideal habitat for breeding and wintering birds, invertebrates and rare plants. This site is especially important for bittern, marsh harriers and the shining ramshorn snail, which are rare across Europe; as well as water voles, which are rare in England.

To learn about the designations and protections at the Reserve, visit Natural England's website:

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Health and the natural environment



© Natural England/Ron Poulter

Walking at Stodmarsh

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.

History of the site

Stodmarsh has a long history of human activity that has shaped the landscape you see today. It has been used by medieval monks to graze horses, as a colliery at the start of the 20th century and as a duck shooting area in the 1930s.

The area has been protected and managed for nature conservation for over 40 years and, despite all the changes in land use here at Stodmarsh, it probably now looks much like it did in medieval times. There is more information on the history of Stodmarsh on an interpretation panel outside the tower hide.

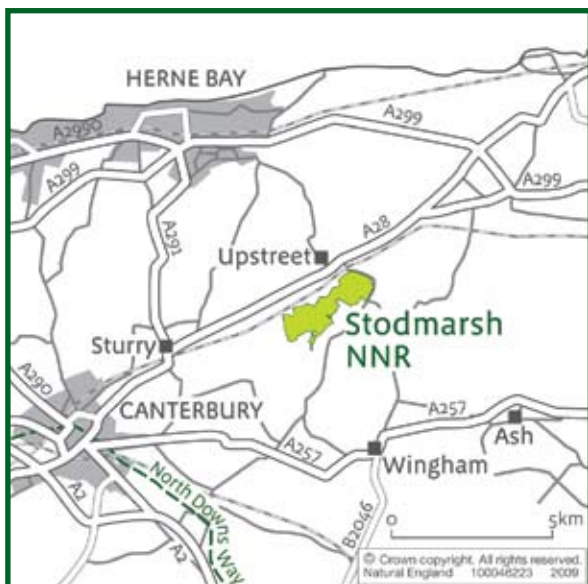


© Dave Rogers

Konik pony

How to get to Stodmarsh

Stodmarsh NNR is on the Great Stour River south of, and almost immediately adjacent to the A28, midway between Canterbury and Margate. The nearest villages are Upstreet on the A28, and Stodmarsh. The nearest train station is Sturry, 5 km to the south west, and a regular bus service runs along the A28 from Sturry to Upstreet. The nearest car park is east of Stodmarsh Village, located along the turn off between the Red Lion pub and the church. There is additional parking by the Grove Ferry Pub (CT3 4BP) which can be found on Grove Road, south east of Upstreet.



Reed beds



© Natural England/Emma Griffiths

Stodmarsh NNR has the largest reed bed in the South East of England, which supports a range of specialised birds and insects. The reed beds are an excellent sanctuary for migrating birds such as swallows and house martins in the summer and starlings in the winter; sometimes thousands can be seen here as they stop overnight before continuing their journey in the morning. We manage this habitat to make it attractive to wildlife by cutting reeds in rotation, controlling scrub and managing water levels.

Bittern



© Natural England/Mike Hammett

Nesting Bittern

These rare birds breed and feed in the reedbeds and are dependent on them for survival. They even point their beaks in the air and sway to imitate the reeds when they feel threatened. Their favourite food are eels, which are plentiful in the clear waters of the River Stour and the surrounding lakes. They also eat fish such as roach and rudd. You are most likely to see a bittern at Stodmarsh in January, when birds migrate here from Europe. You may also hear a male bittern's distinctive 'boom' during their mating season, between April and June.

Marsh harrier

The rare marsh harriers need wetlands to survive. At Stodmarsh they feed on small mammals, birds and marsh frogs that live around the ditches. During the breeding season, especially in April and May, the female does most of the egg incubation and brooding of the chicks and, if you are lucky, you may see their spectacular feeding display. The male harrier calls to the female as he flies over the nest, she then takes off and he passes the prey to the female in mid-air.



Male marsh harrier

Grazing marsh

We control water levels to provide some surface flooding amongst the grass for the wintering and breeding birds that flock here. Local farmers graze cattle on the marsh, keeping the grass short and tussocky. In late spring/early summer, the grass grows quicker than the grazing animals can eat it so, later in the summer, we cut the grass to a manageable height with a tractor. We maintain longer grass and sedges in some areas for other species like snipe.



Male marsh frog

Lakes and pools



© Dave Rogers

Mute swans

The lakes and pools at Stodmarsh NNR are full of invertebrates and fish. They range in size from small larvae and fish fry to large carp and pike. In early summer, you may see large fish in the main lake splashing around in the shallows and swimming into the reeds as they spawn. In the autumn, we lower the water levels in some of the lakes and pools that we can control to expose bare mud for migrating wading birds.



© Dave Rogers

Southern hawker dragonfly

Water vole

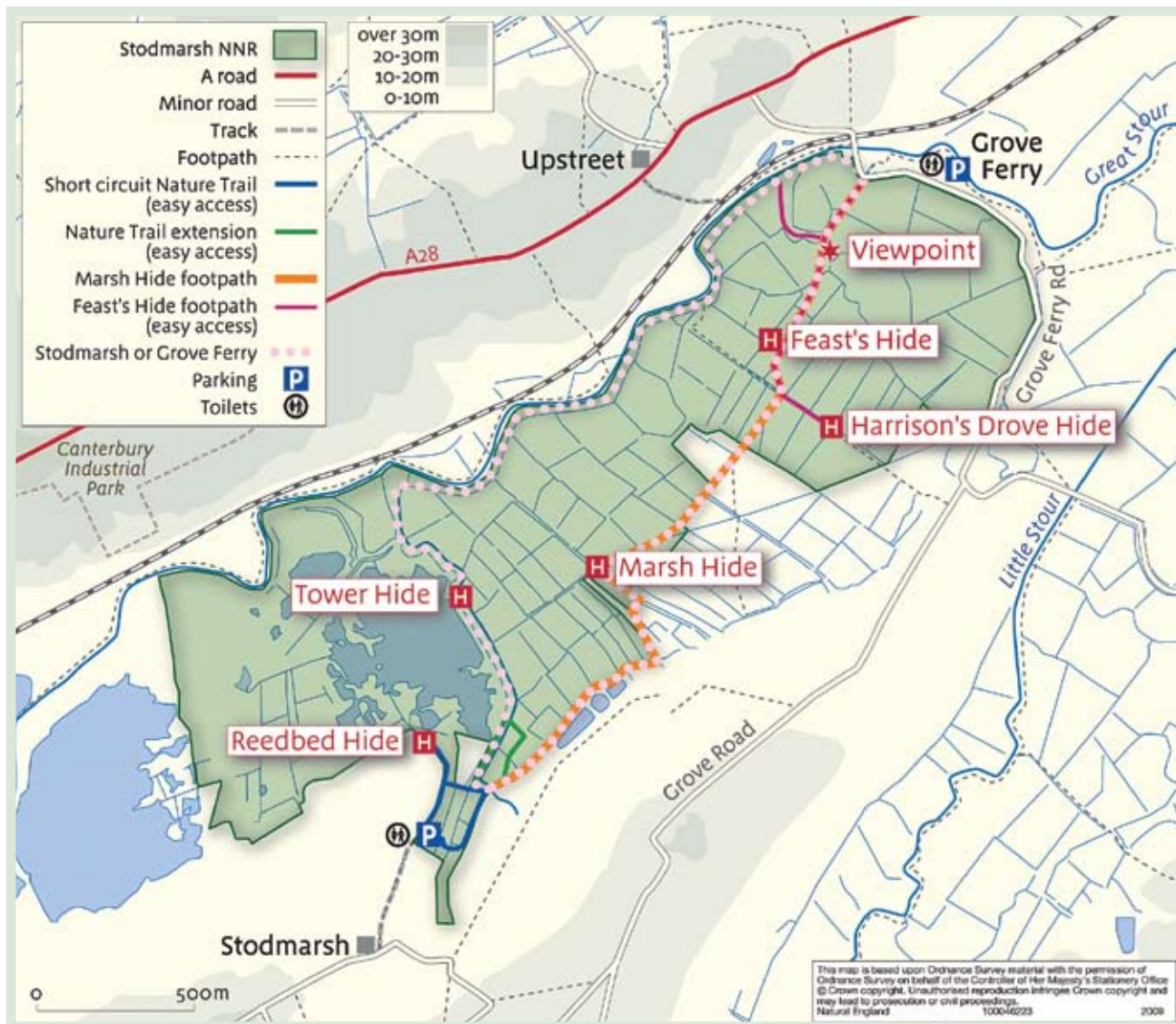
Stodmarsh is one of a handful of nationally important sites for these small mammals and it has a very strong population as the network of ditches and deep reedbeds make a perfect home for them. Water voles are territorial and mark their patch with piles of their droppings in little latrines. Water voles are vegetarian and eat over 200 different plant species.



© Environmental Agency/Hugh Clark

Ditches

The ditches allow us to move water around the Reserve and they provide a habitat for a range of rare plants like sharp-leaved pondweed and rare invertebrates like the shining ramshorn snail. The water levels are controlled to stop them drying up and we clear them out periodically to prevent them becoming completely dominated by reeds or scrub.



Map Key

Interpretation panels will be installed throughout 2009 and they will be located at:

- Stodmarsh car park ■ Reedbed Hide ■ Marsh Hide ■ Feast's Hide ■ Tower Hide
- Harrison's Drove Hide ■ The Viewpoint



© Dave Rogers

Front cover photograph: Reeds in the sun © Dave Rogers

**NATURAL
ENGLAND**

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 that it brings.

© Natural England 2009

ISBN 978-1-84754-124-0

Catalogue Code: NE155

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from:

www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications

Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Printed on Defra Silk comprising 75% recycled fibre.