

**EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds:
Special Protection Area**

MINSMERE-WALBERSWICK (SUFFOLK)

The Minsmere-Walberswick proposed SPA contains areas of grazing marsh, extensive reedbeds, the estuary of the River Blyth, and areas of lowland heath and woodland. The boundaries of the site follows those of the Minsmere-Walberswick Heath and Marshes.SSSI.

Minsmere-Walberswick qualifies under Article 4.1, by supporting, in summer, nationally important breeding populations of the following Annex 1 species: 5 booming male bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* (presumed to represent 5 breeding pairs; 22% of the British breeding population) ; 15 breeding female marsh harriers *Circus aeruginosus* (20% of British) ; 47 pairs of avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (12% of British) ; 32 pairs of little tern *Sterna albifrons* (1% of British): and 24 pairs of nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* (1% of British).

The site qualifies also under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting, in winter, a nationally important wintering population of hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* (15 individuals, 2% of the British wintering population).

Minsmere-Walberswick qualifies under article 4.2 by supporting, in summer, in recent years, nationally important breeding populations of three regularly occurring migratory species: 24 pairs of gadwall *Anas strepera* (4% of British); 73 pairs of teal *A. crecca* (1% of British): and 23 pairs of shoveler *A. clypeata* (2% of British) . Also notable is a nationally important breeding population of bearded tit *Panurus biarmicus* (50 pairs, 8% of British).

The site qualifies also under Article 4.2 by supporting nationally important wintering populations of three migratory waterfowl. (average peak counts for the five year period 1985/86 to 1989/90): 100 European white-fronted geese *Anser albifrons albifrons* (2% of the British wintering population); 90 gadwall *Anas strepera* (1% of British) , and 100 shoveler *Anas clypeata* (1% of British).

Minsmere-Walberswick is also of importance for an outstandingly diverse assemblage of breeding birds of marshland and reedbed habitats, including bittern, garganey *Anas querquedula*, marsh harrier, water rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti* and Savi's warbler *Locustella lusciniodes*. Also notable is an assemblage of wintering waterfowl including, in addition to species listed above, Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, teal *Anas crecca*, avocet; spotted redshank *Tringa erythropus*; and redshank *Tringa totanus*.

During severe winter weather Minsmere-Walberswick can assume even greater national and international importance as wildfowl and waders from many other areas arrive, attracted by relatively mild climate, compared with continental areas, and the abundant food resources available.

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