



# Lindisfarne

National Nature Reserve



# Welcome to Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve

On the edge of Britain, land and water meet. Shifting sands and tides combine to create the 3500 hectares of dunes, saltmarsh and mudflats of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve, home to a fascinating array of wildlife.

This ever-changing landscape has been moulded through time by man and nature to create a unique and spectacular habitat, which you can discover.

## Secrets of the dunes

Brought ashore by water and wind, the sand of the dunes is gradually stabilised by marram grass. Once stable, dunes support many other plants. In the dune slacks (the damper low-lying areas within the dunes) several nationally important plants exist including 11 species of orchid.



Marsh helleborine orchid

©Natural England/Andrew Craggs

Among them is the Lindisfarne helleborine, which is found only on Holy Island. This abundance of flowering plants provides a valuable food source for moths, butterflies such as dark green fritillary and ringlet, and other insects.

Man has lived and worked within the sand dunes at Lindisfarne for centuries. The ninth-century settlement at Green Shiel, rig and furrow farming, and nineteenth-century limekilns all bear testament to man's agricultural and industrial activities here. Visible remains of these activities are gradually disappearing as time and sands roll by.

## Autumn arrivals

In autumn and winter the mudflats host huge flocks of wintering waterfowl, which arrive from the Arctic to feed on the extremely rich supply of marine creatures and vegetation living in and on the mud.



©Natural England/Andrew Craggs

Guided walk through the dunes



You can't see these animals, but you can see the tiny casts they leave behind all over the mudflats.

A variety of wading birds, ducks and geese over-winter on the Reserve. Among these are the rare light-bellied brent geese, which breed in Svalbard (also known as Spitsbergen), the most northerly inhabited island within the Arctic circle. They start to arrive in substantial numbers in September; the Reserve is the largest wintering site in Britain and holds approximately half of the world population. Other internationally important wintering waterfowl found here include pink-footed geese, wigeon, grey plover and bar-tailed godwits.

Reserve staff and volunteers play an important role in conserving the precious habitats that attract them.



## Enjoying Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve

When walking in the dunes please keep to existing routes to minimise damage to this very sensitive habitat. The Nature Trail in this leaflet is suitable for all fitness levels and you can also contact our Reserve staff to join one of our guided walks: see contact details.

The Reserve can be enjoyed all year round. Winter is the best time to see visiting waterfowl, between their arrival in autumn and departure in spring. Autumn and spring are the best times for spotting rare birds on migration. The stunning flowers, butterflies and other insects are best enjoyed in spring and summer.

### Taking care on the Reserve

- Check the Causeway crossing times before you arrive. The tide is very rapid, coming in twice a day and water levels can rise quickly, you could find yourself stranded in a very short period of time.

### Help us to look after the Reserve

- Please keep dogs on a lead or at heel at all times to avoid disturbance to birds and grazing livestock.
- Observe any Open Access restrictions – these will be clearly signposted and are in place to protect the special wildlife of the area.
- Do not use any mountain bikes, camp or light fires.
- Do not disturb wildlife, remove animals or plants or touch nests and eggs.
- Leave nothing and take away only memories.



© Natural England/Andrew Craggs

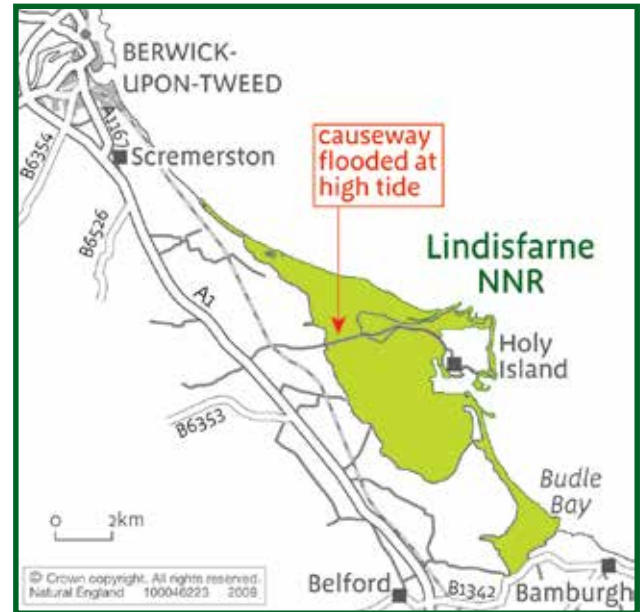
Ringed plover

Be particularly careful on the foreshore and the dunes during the bird breeding season, from early April to the end of July. To protect species including the ringed plover, localised exclusions apply during this time.

For more information on the byelaws specific to Lindisfarne NNR please see the back of the welcome signs.

## How to get here

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve is situated on the North Northumberland coast, approximately 10 miles south of Berwick-upon-Tweed. Easily accessible from the A1, follow the signs for Holy Island/Beal. Parking restrictions apply on the Island



but there is parking available at Beal and on the edge of the village. Please use car parks provided, do not park on any of the sensitive saltmarsh and mudflat areas.

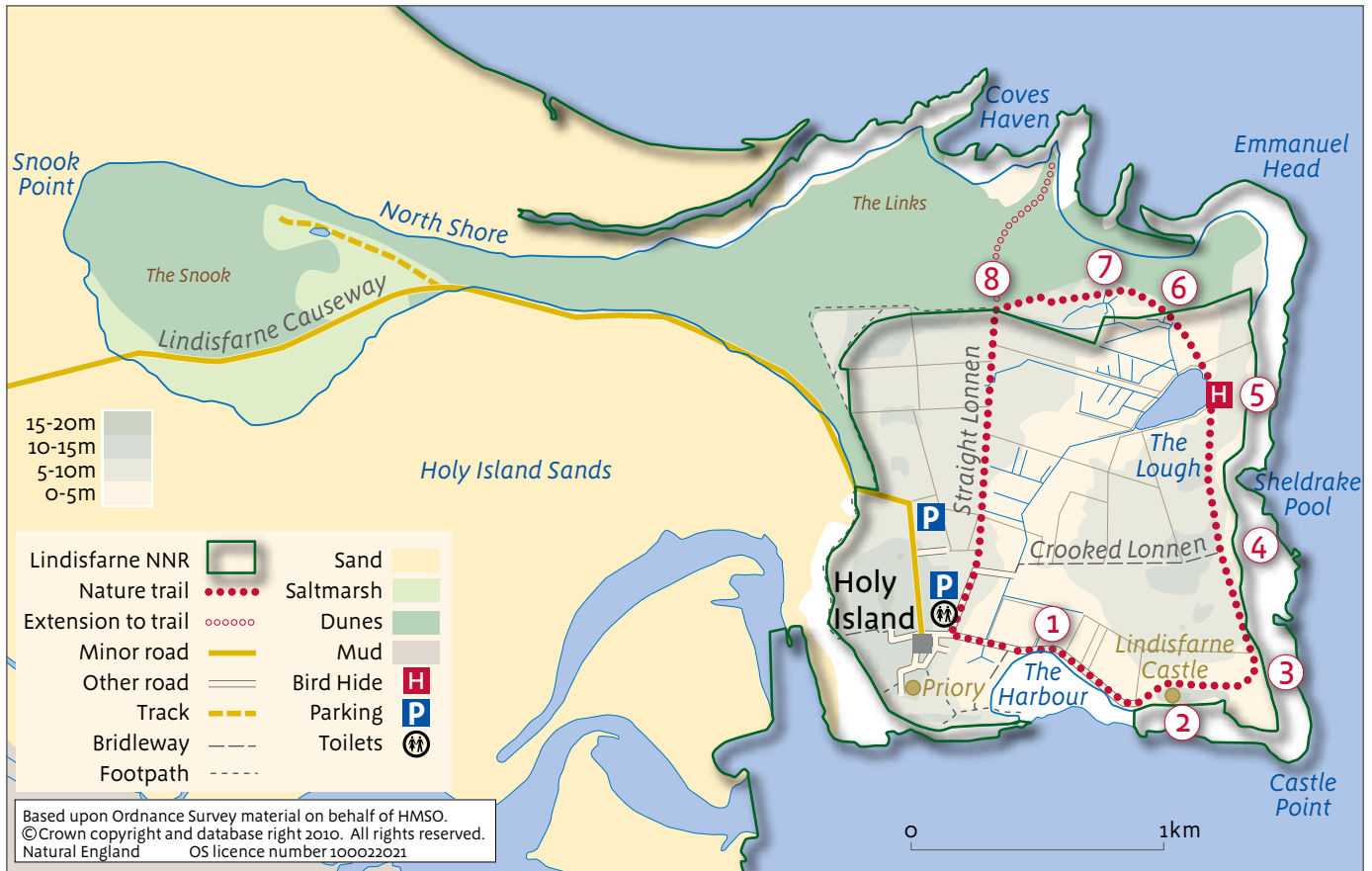
For local bus timetables visit [www.travelinenortheast.info](http://www.travelinenortheast.info) or call 0871 200 22 33.

The National Cycle Network takes in Lindisfarne and is part of the Coast & Castles cycle route. [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk) or call the Sustrans Information Line on 0845 113 00 65.

The Reserve is covered by OS Landranger 75 and OS Explorer 340.

## Contact details

For more information about the Reserve, guided walks or volunteering opportunities please contact the Reserve base on 01289 381470.



## Nature Trail

Please keep to existing paths and desire lines. This will help you to avoid the invasive plant pirri-pirri bur, native to New Zealand. The burs are a hazard for walkers and dogs alike, as they cling to clothing and fur. Please ensure the burs are not transported to other sites.

Follow this trail to see the many different aspects of Lindisfarne and its National Nature Reserve. Along the route, numbered wooden posts mark stopping points to view the stunning scenery, plant and bird life. The Trail is 5km/3 miles long and takes 1.5-3 hours to walk.





Male and female red-breasted mergansers

all ©

### Post ①

Begin at **Post 1**, by the Window on Wild Lindisfarne building.

Look seaward. The tall beacons ahead of you helped sea-going vessels chart a course out of the natural harbour, known locally as the Ouse. Upturned boats on the shore are reminders of the herring industry that once supported the local population. Today's fish catchers are birds including cormorants, eider ducks and also summer-visiting terns that migrate here from Africa.

Wintering birds find plentiful food on the wet fields, mudflats and in the Ouse. Light-bellied brent geese, curlews and the much smaller dunlin can be seen from autumn onwards and red-breasted mergansers can be seen on the sea. In summer, shelducks lay their eggs down former rabbit burrows.

Search the wall near the gate to find ferns, including wall-rue and maidenhair spleenwort. White-flowered scurvy grass, which provided essential vitamins for sailors, grows in clumps between the stone seats near the shore.

The tall building you can see on the Heugh to the right of the harbour, the Lookout on Wild Lindisfarne, is ideally placed to provide excellent



Light-bellied brent geese

all ©

views of the grey and harbour seals that bask on the sandbars of the Flats.

### Post ②

Continue along the road and find Post 2 on the right, just through the castle gate.

The Whin Sill, a line of very hard rock running across northern England, provides a foundation for the sixteenth-century castle. Built to guard the harbour entrance, it now looks out on red-throated divers and red-necked grebes as they feed in winter. Smart black and white oystercatchers, with their bright orange bills, roost on outlying rocky islets.

You are now standing at the end of a nineteenth-century waggon-way, which brought limestone that used to be quarried on the north of the island, to be burnt in limekilns by the castle. It was then taken by boat to sweeten fields on the mainland. Follow this tramway to the left of the castle. On the rocky base of the castle, look out for sea campion, biting stoncrop and sea thrift amongst the red valerian and wallflowers. For most of the year, you will be watched from above by pairs of fulmars roosting high on the crags.



©Natural England/Andrew Craggs

Grey seals

### Post ③

Do not go under the bridge, but climb up onto the waggon-way. Walk until you reach **Post 3** next to the gate.

Looking out to sea in clear weather, you will see the Farne Islands, another National Nature Reserve and the most easterly outcrop of the Whin Sill. The islands are home to many grey seals and thousands of seabirds, including guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes, which all breed there.

Look back along the shore to a storm beach, where fierce weather has thrown up countless stones rounded by the sea. Most fascinating are Saint Cuthbert's Beads, fossilised remains of animals called crinoids, which resemble the broken beads of a rosary. Although apparently barren ground, ringed plovers may breed here and rock pipits search for food.

### Post ④

Continue along the waggon-way to **Post 4**.

If you look across to the foreshore, you may see wading birds such as knot and turnstone. As

their name implies, turnstone upturn pebbles to feed on insects underneath. Around the rock pools grow various seaweeds, including serrated wrack, bladder wrack and knotted wrack. Where enough water remains at low tide, hermit and shore crabs may be found. Winkles and limpets graze on the surface of the rocks, mussels and tiny barnacles filter food from the water as it covers them.

### Post ⑤

Continue along the waggon-way to **Post 5** at the bird hide by the Lough.

Before Christians settled here, alder, hazel, birch and willow wooded the area. Natural England has re-introduced a small area of trees to provide food and shelter for animals and birds. The shallow freshwater lake was perhaps dug out by monks, to provide a water supply and for fish. From inside the hide, you can watch waterfowl such as little grebe, shoveler, mallard, moorhen and coot. Black-headed gulls nest in the vegetation, which includes velvet-tipped reedmace, waving reeds, yellow iris and floating bogbean. Peregrine, sparrowhawk and short-eared owls hunt over the Lough in winter, when diving ducks such as pochard and tufted duck may be joined by small groups of whooper swans.

### Post ⑥

Continue along the waggon-way until you reach the kissing gate and **Post 6**, opposite the welcome sign.

Marram grass is the main dune stabiliser. Once the sand becomes fixed by marram, it gives way to other grasses, mosses and lichens. Tussocks of grass provide homes for insects and make ideal nest sites for skylarks and meadow pipits, hidden from the eyes of local foxes.



Grazing cattle

### Post ⑦

Turn left, following the path beside the farm wall. At the wall corner, you reach **Post 7**.

The grassland here is grazed by livestock in late summer. This grazing keeps the grass short and allows marsh and spotted orchids, twayblade and grass of Parnassus to flourish. This habitat is ideal for a range of insects, including many moths and butterflies. Rare dark green fritillaries fly here in summer and you may see grayling basking in sunny, sandy spots. Wet ditches and pools offer common frogs, smooth newts and other amphibians the chance to breed.

### Post ⑧

Please keep to the path, continuing until it meets the Straight Lonnen at **Post 8**.

Here too, you may see moths and butterflies, some attracted to the bright yellow flowers of ragwort in the summer. The small tortoiseshell butterfly feeds on it, as does the dark red and green cinnabar moth. Its caterpillar can be

recognised by its black and yellow hoops. A similar looking moth is the six-spotted burnet, which cannot resist the purple and blue spikes of viper's bugloss.

### Post ⑨

For an interesting extension to the walk, turn right and follow white-topped posts through the dunes to the final red-topped post, from where you may see seals and nesting fulmars. Otherwise, turn left and follow the Straight Lonnen back to the car park.

Along the way you may be accompanied by the eerie calls of lapwings or the strident alarm of the watchful redshank. Birds of prey such as kestrels and merlins use the dry stone walls as hunting lookouts. The hawthorn hedges are a magnet for birds crossing to and from Scandinavia in spring and autumn. These migrants include thrushes such as redwing and fieldfare, in large noisy flocks, delighting in the hawthorn berries in autumn. Smaller migrants such as tiny goldcrests, hunt for insects among the branches.



Dark green fritillary



England's National Nature Reserves are among the best wildlife and earth heritage sites in the country and many are important in an international context.

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England in consultation with local residents, farmers and the Joint Advisory Committee.

The Reserve is also part of a European network of designated protected sites due to the important habitats and rich variety of wildlife they support. The Reserve is also part of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and European Marine Site (EMS).

**Front cover image: Sandham Bay**

© Natural England/Andrew Craggs



**Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.**

ISBN 978-1-84754-116-X Catalogue Code: NE147  
Version 3 – February 2014

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from:  
[www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications](http://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](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

**[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)**



Search for 'England's National Nature Reserves'

---

This note/report/publication is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions.

For details of the licence visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright)

Natural England photographs are only available for non-commercial purposes. If any other information, such as maps or data, cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note/report/publication.

© **Natural England 2014**