



# Saltfleetby – Theddlethorpe Dunes

National Nature Reserve



## Welcome to Saltfleetby – Theddlethorpe Dunes Nature Reserve

Saltfleetby – Theddlethorpe Dunes stretches for 8 km along the north-east coast of Lincolnshire. Its constantly changing habitats, shaped by the wind and sea, are home to a wealth of plants, birds and insects.

Although this wild area is the result of natural processes, it has been influenced over time by man. The site was purchased by the Air Ministry for use as a bombing range in the 1930s, and the beach was littered with old vehicles which were used as targets. During the Second World War tank traps and pillboxes were built, and the dunes were mined to defend against invasion. In 1969, part of the site was handed over to the Nature Conservancy and declared a National Nature Reserve (NNR). The bombing range eventually moved to Donna Nook in 1973.



© Natural England

Saltmarsh rainbow

## The Dunes

The sand dunes we see today first began to form in the thirteenth century after some unusually large storms. The sea threw up shingle and strong winds blew sand to the back of the beach. This process continues today, creating new shingle ridges, dunes and saltmarsh.

The sand at Saltfleetby is very fine and is easily blown off the beach onto the land. The dunes are stabilised by marram grass, allowing other plants like bird's-foot-trefoil, pyramidal orchid and viper's-

bugloss to become established. These in turn support an array of bees and butterflies. The smaller insects are hunted by dragonflies and robber-flies that patrol the dunes. Prickly sea buckthorn, hawthorn and elder cover much of the dunes and is an important habitat on this coastline. It provides safe cover and a nesting site for birds, including dunnocks and wrens, as well as summer visitors, including whitethroats and willow warblers. Throughout the autumn and winter, its berries, along with hawthorn and elder berries feed the fieldfare and redwing which visit from Scandinavia.



## The Marshes

The low areas between the dune ridges hold rain water. The freshwater marshes that have developed here are home to water-loving plants including yellow iris, meadow sweet and cuckoo flower. It is here that the dragonflies and damselflies breed, and it is also an important habitat for the increasingly scarce water vole.

Together, the sand, mud and saltmarsh at Saltfleetby provide food and refuge for the many birds that visit our shores from the arctic, over winter. Ringed plover and sanderling eat the small sandhoppers and shellfish found at the sea's edge, while curlew probe the mud for lugworms, brent geese graze the saltmarsh grass and flocks of twite and snow bunting feast on the seeds of the saltmarsh plants.



Freshwater marsh, Rimac





## The Rimac Trail

This easy access trail is suitable for wheelchairs, pushchairs, younger and older groups. The shorter circuit is 500 m, the figure of eight circuit is 850 m.

The track slopes gently to the Saltmarsh viewing platform, past spiny bushes of sea buckthorn. Natural England manages this invasive plant by periodic clearings to allow the grassland to survive.

Looking out across the Saltmarsh, you will see an array of plants able to withstand being covered in seawater. In Spring, redshank breed here, and in summer purple sea lavender covers the area. Brent geese, shelduck and curlew can be seen throughout autumn, and in winter finches and buntings come to eat the plant seeds.

The shorter circuit passes through flower rich dune grassland, where pyramidal and bee orchids grow. The pond platform will allow you a closer look at the leaches and water scorpions which live in the waters.

If you continue further into the freshwater marsh on the figure of eight circuit, you may be lucky enough to hear or see the water voles as they dive for cover, as you pass over the bridge.

## The Churchill Lane Trail

The Churchill Lane Trail is comprised of two circular walks.

**Oliver's trail (1 km). Easy access, some gentle slopes. Marked by blue arrows.**

This walk begins winding its way along the back of the dunes, older grasslands which are managed by grazing, cutting and scrub clearance to encourage wildflowers including pyramidal orchids and fairy flax. During the day look out for common lizards and at dusk for barn owls hunting for short-tailed field voles.

The trail cuts back alongside an area of freshwater marsh, where you will see southern marsh orchid and yellow flag. The freshwater marsh is full of life, toads, frogs and newts abound, as well as dragonflies and damselflies.

**The Coastguard trail (2 km). Easy to mid-difficulty, gentle slopes with some soft sand. Marked by yellow arrows.**

So-called because it is the route the coastguard would have taken on his smuggling patrols, this trail follows the same route as Oliver's trail, but instead of cutting back through the freshwater marsh, continue out towards the beach, passing the RAF base. This area was a bombing range up until the 1970s, and unexploded munitions are still being cleared today.

The dense sea buckthorn, hawthorn and elder scrub which cover the dunes here are ideal nesting sites for whitethroat, willow warbler and blackcap, as well as producing winter berries for visiting thrushes through the winter.



Sea buckthorn, Theddlethorpe

## The Seaview Trail

The Seaview trail is made up of three walks.

### **The Meadow Loop (1 km). Easy with some gentle slopes. Marked by pink arrows.**

This trail takes you around one of the few traditional hay meadows that remain on this coast. It is cut annually, then grazed by Hebridean sheep. This form of management allows the flowers to compete with the grasses, and throughout summer you can see a glorious display of bee and early purple orchids, yellow rattles and knapweed, visited by butterflies including common blue, ringlets and small skippers.

### **The Paradise Trail (2 km). Easy to mid-difficulty. Gentle slopes, can be slippery along saltmarsh path. Marked by yellow arrows.**

Cross the sea buckthorn-covered dune ridge and turn left along the edge of the saltmarsh. During summer, sea lavender and thrift brighten the landscape, and skylarks can be heard. Over winter, redshank and brent geese feed on the saltmarsh. The trail then cuts behind the dunes and through the wildflower meadows managed by the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.

### **The Stubbs Trail (2 km). Easy to mid-difficulty. Gentle slopes, can be slippery along saltmarsh path. Marked by blue arrows.**

This trail follows the public footpath south, along the back of the dunes, offering good views of the grazed marshes and coastal grassland that borders the reserve. You will also be able to view the temporary ponds that are maintained for the natterjack toad.



## How to get here

### By car

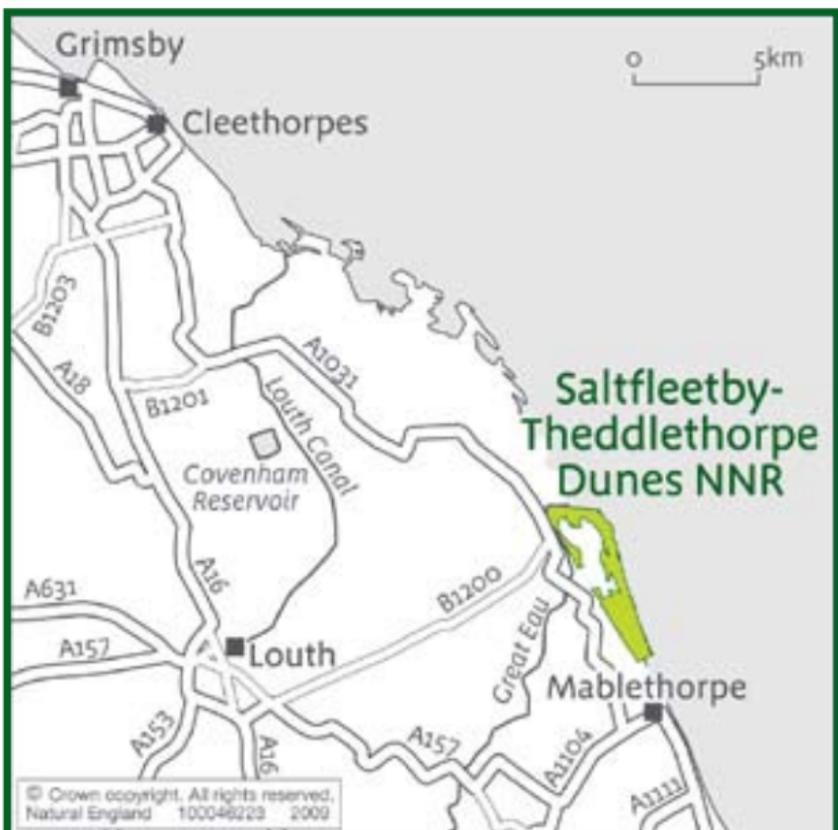
The Reserve can be accessed from seven car parks (see map), located a short distance from the A1301 between Saltfleet and Mablethorpe.

### By bus

Bus services from Grimsby stop at Saltfleet, Monday – Saturday. Buses from Louth and Mablethorpe stop at Theddlethorpe and Saltfleetby, Monday – Saturday.

### By foot

A public footpath runs along the landward edge of most of the reserve, and between the dunes and the saltmarsh. Part of the site is used by the Ministry of Defence for demolition and care should be taken when the warning flags are flying.





Volunteers at a moth event

The reserve is managed by Natural England in partnership with the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and the Ministry of Defence.

Saltfleetby – Theddlethorpe Dunes are among England's finest sites for wildlife and geology, providing excellent opportunities to experience nature. You can access the dunes all year, but please keep to the marked paths. We welcome volunteers who would like to help with conservation management, monitoring, office duties and events.

Natural England run a range of free guided walks and activities from May to September each year.

Dogs are welcome but please keep them on a lead or close at heel at all times.

For further information about the Reserve call 01507 338611 or visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)



Grazing management on the reserve

**Front cover photograph:**

Saltfleetby fore-dunes © Natural England



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