

Nature Discovery Trail

The Nature Discovery Trail starts from the MWT Ayres Nature Discovery Centre and is aimed at children but suitable for adults too. The trail passes through the different habitats and is 1 mile, 1.7km long. Families can borrow a Nature Discovery rucksack from the visitor centre, full of equipment and suggestions for activities for children.



MWT Ayres Nature Discovery Centre and Viewing Tower

Manx Wildlife Trust's Ayres Nature Discovery Centre offers displays and activities for adults and children and is staffed by volunteers who are happy to help with visitor queries. There is a short film about the wildlife of the reserve which visitors may like to see before setting out for a walk. For more information and opening times please see Manx Wildlife Trust website www.mwt.im

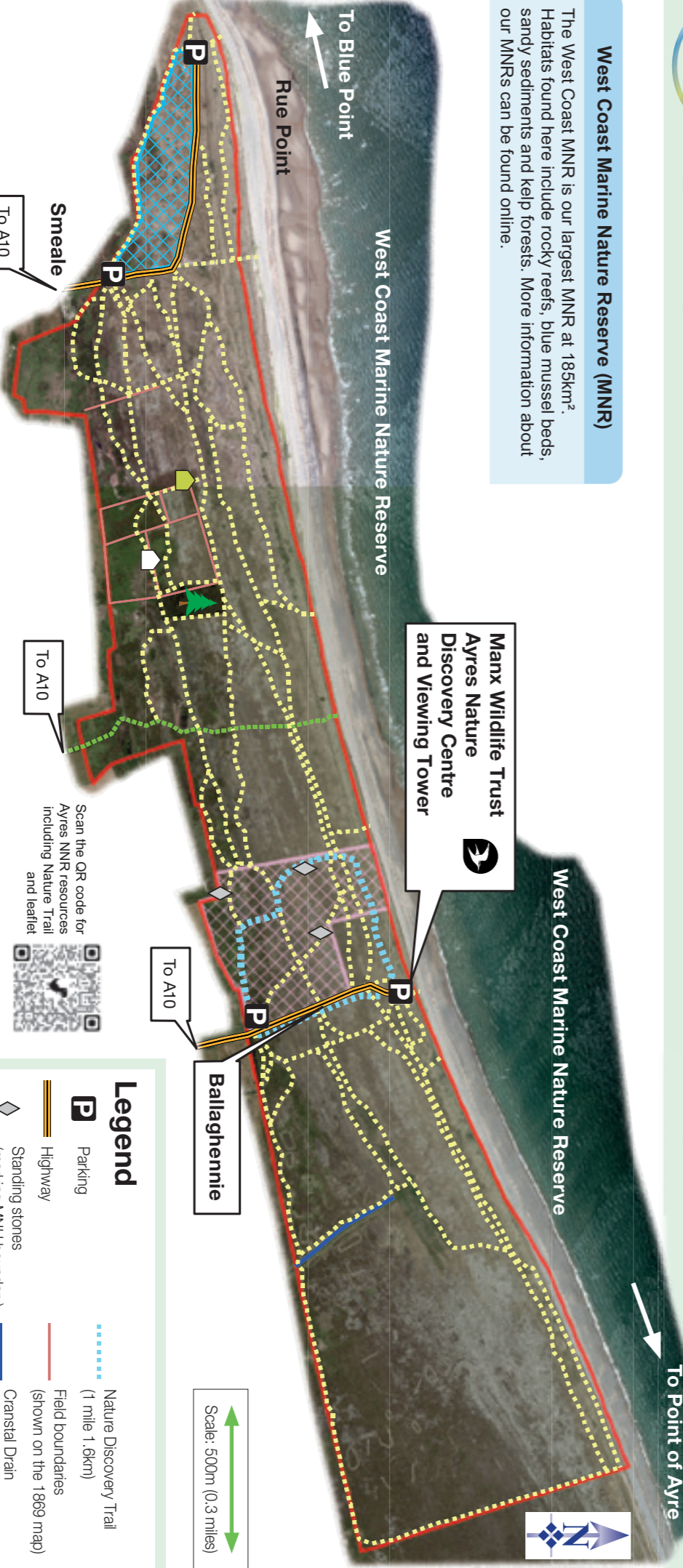


Scan the QR code for Ayres NNR resources including Nature Trail and leaflet

Legend

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Nature Discovery Trail (1 mile 1.6km) | | Field boundaries (shown on the 1869 map) |
| | Paths | | Cranstal Drain (shown on the 1869 map) |
| | Public Footpath | | Plantation (planted in 1967) |
| | Parking | | Recreation Area (NNR) |
| | Highway | | National Nature Reserve (NNR) |
| | Standing stones (marking MNH boundary) | | Manx National Trust Land |
| | Former Wing Marker's Shelter (MWT Training) | | |
| | Remains of limekiln (shown on the 1869 map) | | |

Scale: 500m (0.3 miles)



West Coast Marine Nature Reserve (MNR)

The West Coast MNR is our largest MNR at 185km². Habitats found here include rocky reefs, blue mussel beds, sandy sediments and kelp forests. More information about our MNRs can be found online.

To Point of Ayre

West Coast Marine Nature Reserve

Manx Wildlife Trust
Ayres Nature
Discovery Centre
and Viewing Tower

West Coast Marine Nature Reserve

To Blue Point

Rue Point

Ballaghennie

To A10

To A10

To A10

The Ayres National Nature Reserve is 673 acres (272.5 hectares) of dunes, dune grassland and lichen heath. It was designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) in 1996. The land is owned by the DEFA and Manx National Heritage. The MWT Ayres Nature Discovery Centre is run by Manx Wildlife Trust. The Ayres has special habitats and species unique on the Island. The NNR is a core conservation area of UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man.



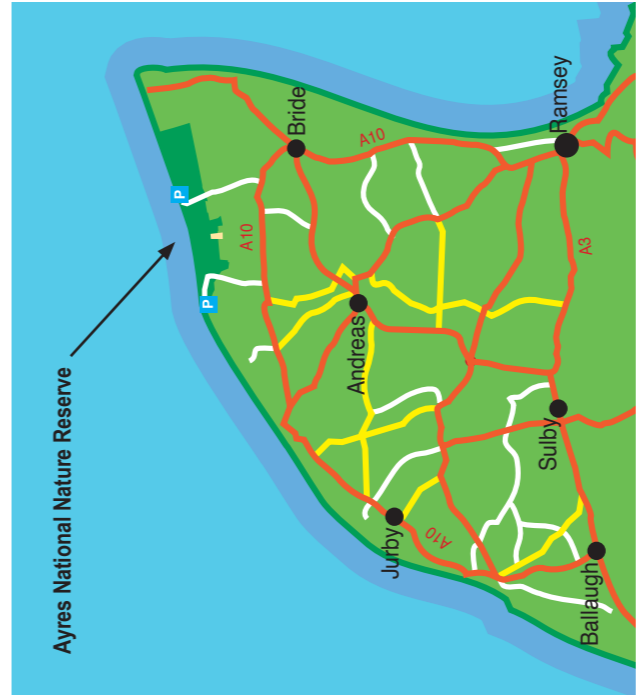
Ayres NNR Byelaws 2005 and 2023

Byelaws are in place to protect the special wildlife at the Ayres NNR for everyone's enjoyment. Penalties of up to £5,000 can be imposed for non-compliance. View the full Department land Byelaws on the Isle of Man Government website, or see the information boards on site.

- You are welcome to this NNR, but please be sensitive to the wildlife that lives here. Do not disturb. Do not pick wildflowers or fungi.
- Keep your dog on a lead (no more than 3m long) when signs are in place usually from 1st April to the 31st July to protect ground nesting birds and their chicks.
- Dog fouling must be removed and placed in the litter bins.
- Dogs must be under proper control and prevented from worrying, disturbing or chasing any animal or bird, or causing a nuisance or annoyance to any person.
- Avoid using the upper shore between 1st April and 31st July to avoid disturbing nesting birds. Eggs and chicks are camouflaged and can be at high density. Once chicks hatch out they move across the entire beach including below the high tide mark.
- Overnight stay is not permitted on the NNR.
- Fires, including barbeques, are not permitted on the NNR.
- Drivers, please park in designated parking areas only. No off-road motorcycling or driving.
- No shooting.
- Take your litter home or use the bins provided.

Ignoring this Code could lead to prosecution under the Ayres NNR Byelaws, Wildlife Act, the Highways Act or the Manx Museum and National Trust Act.

Location of the Reserve



Access to the Reserve is from two sign-posted access roads off the A10 (Bride to Jurby coast road)

Access to the western end of the Reserve is via the Ballakinnag Road. Access to the eastern end of the Reserve and MWT Ayres Nature Discovery Centre is via the Ballaghennie Road (W3W carnivore.daytime.ernally).

DEFA WARDEN

DEFA manage the reserve and a DEFA Warden is available to answer questions and enforce the Ayres NNR Byelaws and Wildlife Act 1990.

GUIDED WALKS

Guided walks with the Warden can be booked for groups.

CONTACT DETAILS

Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture
Tel: 01624 651577 Email: Ecopolicy@gov.im
DEFA Warden mobile: 07624 365131

Endorsed by Manx National Heritage and Manx Wildlife Trust



Ayres National Nature Reserve



Pyramidal orchid

Curlew

Common lizard

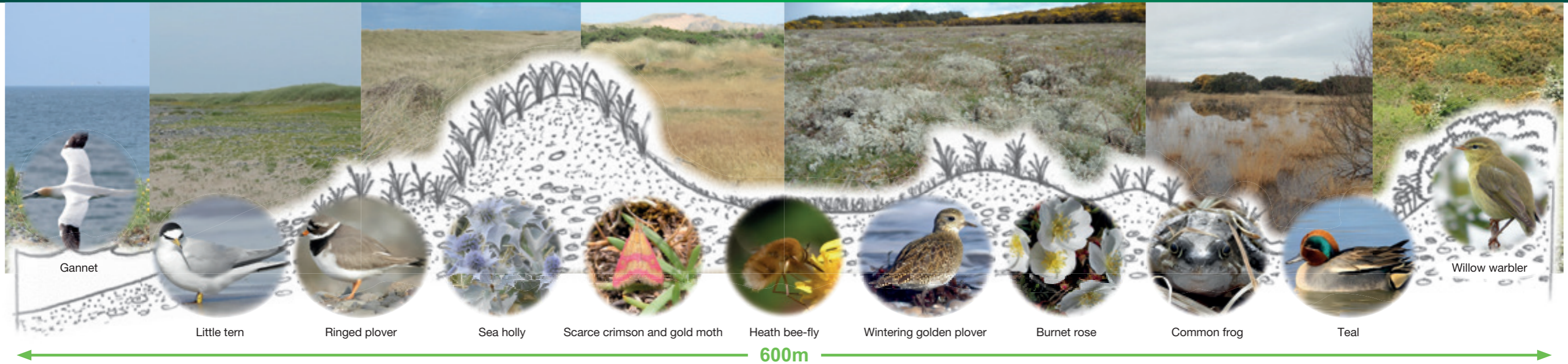
Green tiger beetle on lichen



Isle of Man
Government
Belgys Eilan Vannor

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA)
Rheynn Chymmlytaight, Bee as Eirryns

Offshore Shingle beach Dunes Dune grassland Lichen heath Dune slacks Scrub



Geological history Approximately 10,000 years ago the last glacier retreated and the NNR was covered by the sea and this is evidenced by the **former sea cliff** running inland from Blue Point towards Smeale. Once the weight of the ice was removed the land very slowly rose, a process known as glacial uplift, and the sea retreated as gravel banks built up. This process over many thousands of years has created an outstanding example of a geological feature known as **raised beach**. The word **'ayre'** comes from a Norse word meaning gravel bank. The inland banks are older than those forming along the shoreline. **Ecological succession** can be clearly seen in the habitats that have developed over the gravel banks making the Ayres an excellent **outdoor classroom**. Early succession habitats and pioneer plants are found nearest to the sea and older well developed habitats are found on the southern boundary.



Former sea cliff running inland from Blue Point

Sea currents With the help of the prevailing winds, north-westerly currents move sand and shingle along the west coast towards the Ayres in a process known as **long shore drift**. When the sediment reaches the Ayres it is deposited in parallel banks. Evidence of this accretion can best be seen at Rue Point.

Wind At low tide dry sand is transported up the shingle beach by the wind and is deposited on the gravel banks to create **embryo dunes**. The sand remains mobile until it becomes trapped by **marram grass**. Other species are then able to take hold as the sand becomes stable and the soil nutrients increase.

The **shingle beach** is made up of rounded stones deposited at the end of the last ice age, and because they originate from many places, the rock types are diverse, an example is riebeckite stones from Ailsa Craig. This mobile substrate is a very harsh environment in which only very specialist plant and animal species can survive.

The plants have to be tolerant of flooding, high winds and salt spray on a regular basis, some have a waxy layer to prevent water loss, others have a deep root system to anchor them and gather water. The majority of plants on the shingle beach produce large quantities of seed that also provides a good food source for **linnets** and **twite**.

Little tern, Arctic tern, ringed plover and **oystercatcher** make their nests on the beach; eggs and chicks are patterned to blend in with the surrounding stones making it very hard to see them. The success of these beach nesting birds is precarious and they face many challenges: predation of eggs and chicks by hedgehogs, rats, cats, crows and gulls; accidental trampling of eggs and chicks by people; food shortages and prolonged periods of rain.

Dunes develop where there is a constant supply of blown sand and **marram grass** to stabilise the sand. The habitat, though less harsh than the shingle beach, is colonised by specialist plants tolerant to the salt spray and mobile free-draining substrate. Once the sand stabilises colourful plants such as **pyramidal orchids, sea holly** and **sea bindweed** can be found during the summer months. From April to July the bubbling call of **curlews** can be heard throughout the dunes as they hold territories and fend off predators.

Dune grasslands occurs between the dunes and the heath and **sweet vernal grass** is the most common grass species here. Look out for **sand sedge** that spreads by underground

rhizomes giving it the appearance of growing in straight lines. **Marram grass** still occurs where the underlying sand is deep enough.

Lichen heath A **lichen** is a combination of an alga and a fungus. This partnership of two different organisms enables them to grow in barren conditions. The reserve has an internationally important area of lichens which grow amongst the ling (common heather) and bell heather. This type of habitat cannot be found anywhere else on the Island.

Keep an eye out for **common lizards**. They can be very fast and disappear quickly into any cover: **Skylarks** and **meadow pipits** make their nests on the ground, from grasses. In places the native **western gorse** can be found mixed in with the **ling** and **bell heather**. It's a low growing shrub with plenty of spines, so please keep to the paths to avoid getting sore ankles and disturbing ground nesting birds. **Stonechats** perch on bushes making a chat chat call if you are too close to their nest or young.

Dune slacks are typically damp hollows between dune ridges. However, on the Ayres NNR they occur some distance from the dunes. **Reed bunting** feed on the **purple moor grass** seed in autumn. The slacks are home to an interesting array of invertebrates including the **common groundhopper**, the **silverhook moth** and **Mother Shipton moth**.

Scrub European gorse forms large patches of scrub that are beneficial to a range of birds including **linnet** and nesting **long-eared owl**. Mixed in with the scrub are dense bramble patches, the flowers of which provide nectar for insects and blackberries for winter thrushes. European gorse spreads easily and is managed to maintain an open landscape for ground nesting birds and to protect the lichen heath.

The conifer plantation was planted in 1967 and is used by nesting **raven, mistle thrush, chaffinch** and **goldcrest**.

Through the Seasons

Spring Listen out for melodious song of the **skylark** over the dune grassland and heath. **Frogs** congregate in dune slacks to lay their spawn. The salmon pink flowers of **early marsh orchid** and the purple flowers of **northern marsh orchid** can be found in the dune slacks. **Orange tip butterflies**, which have overwintered as chrysalises, begin to emerge in March to lay their eggs on **lady's smock**. **Cuckoo** are heard at Ballaghennie and migrating **wheatear** are frequently seen and occasionally an **osprey**.

Summer **Willow warbler** and **whitethroat** will have arrived from Europe and can be seen collecting insects for their growing broods of chicks. The beach is now a nursery ground for **little tern, oystercatcher** and **ringed plover**. If walking on the beach, stay close to the sea, but keep a look out as chicks will wander across the entire beach under the watchful eyes of their parents. **Common blue, small heath, meadow brown, dark green fritillary** and **grayling** butterflies can be seen at various times over the summer months. Masses of **burnet roses** flower in early June providing a wonderful fragrance on sunny days. The dunes are full of flowers from late June to early July including **pyramidal orchids, restharrow, bird's-foot trefoil, sheepsbit, biting stonecrop** and **wild thyme**. Watch diving **gannets** and inquisitive **grey seals** from the viewing tower at Ballaghennie.

Autumn **Sanderling, dunlin** and **ringed plover** stop to rest and refuel on **sandflies** before continuing their autumn migration south. The sand dunes have their own **fungi** community, many of which are uncommon or rare in the British Isles. Large, hairy **fox moth** caterpillars can be seen crossing paths to find a place to hibernate, before they pupate in April.

Winter On a calm day, offshore you can see the following birds diving for fish: **red-throated divers, great northern divers**, the occasional **black-throated diver, shags** and **cormorants**. The slacks and seasonal pools are full and attract shy waterfowl including **teal, moorhen** and **coot**.