

The Ayres National Nature Reserve

Kemmyrk Nadoor Ashoonagh ny h-Ayrey



Lichen
Usnea articulata
Scryss ny Greg



Lichen Heath
Reeast Scryss ny Greg



Common Lizard
Jiolgan-Leaghyr



Lichen
Cladonia portentosa
Scryss



Little Tern
Gant Beg



Ringed Plover
Feddag Ainnit



Oystercatcher
Garee Breck (in the north);
Bridjeen (in the south)

The Ayres has long been recognised by naturalists as an area of outstanding wildlife interest and unique importance. Official recognition came in 1996 when the Ayres was designated the Isle of Man's first Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), and in 2000 the Ayres was designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR). These designations give the site special protection under the Wildlife Act.

The National Nature Reserve is 260 hectares (642 acres) and is jointly held by the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (238 hectares), Manx National Heritage (20 hectares), and a private landowner (2 hectares).

The Ayres is an example of a raised beach, and is the "newest" part of the Isle of Man. It has a unique combination of habitats for the Island including the shingle beach, marram dunes, fixed dunes, dune grassland, lichen heath, gallic heath, wet slacks and ponds. The Ayres also has many rare species not found anywhere else on the Island.

Lichen Heath

An extensive area of **Lichen Heath** has colonised the raised beach at the Ayres. **Lichen Heath** is an extremely rare habitat not only on the Isle of Man, but also within the British Isles and worldwide. **Lichen Heath** at the Ayres is an exceptional example of this type of habitat. **Lichens** are made up of a photosynthetic green alga and a fungus. The **Lichen** *Usnea articulata* only grows where the air is very clean. It is found in abundance at the Ayres. *Usnea articulata* usually grows on trees, but at the Ayres grows on bare ground.

Ground-nesting Birds

The Ayres is an important breeding area for many species of ground-nesting birds that have declined elsewhere in recent years. **Little Terns**, **Arctic Terns**, **Ringed Plovers** and **Oystercatchers** nest on the shingle beach; their eggs and chicks are camouflaged to look like pebbles in the sand and are easily stepped on. **Curlews**, **Lapwings**, **Skylarks** and **Meadow Pipits** make their nests out of grasses in the dunes, heath and wet slacks. Because these birds nest in the open and on the ground they are extremely susceptible to disturbance. If your presence keeps the birds off the eggs for too long the eggs may become cold and die; unprotected eggs and young are vulnerable to predators. **During the bird breeding season (April to the end of July) please stay on the paths and avoid walking on the upper beach.** Raising chicks can take a long time particularly for a big bird like the **Curlew**. The parent incubates the eggs for 30 days and it takes another 5-6 weeks before the chicks can fly.



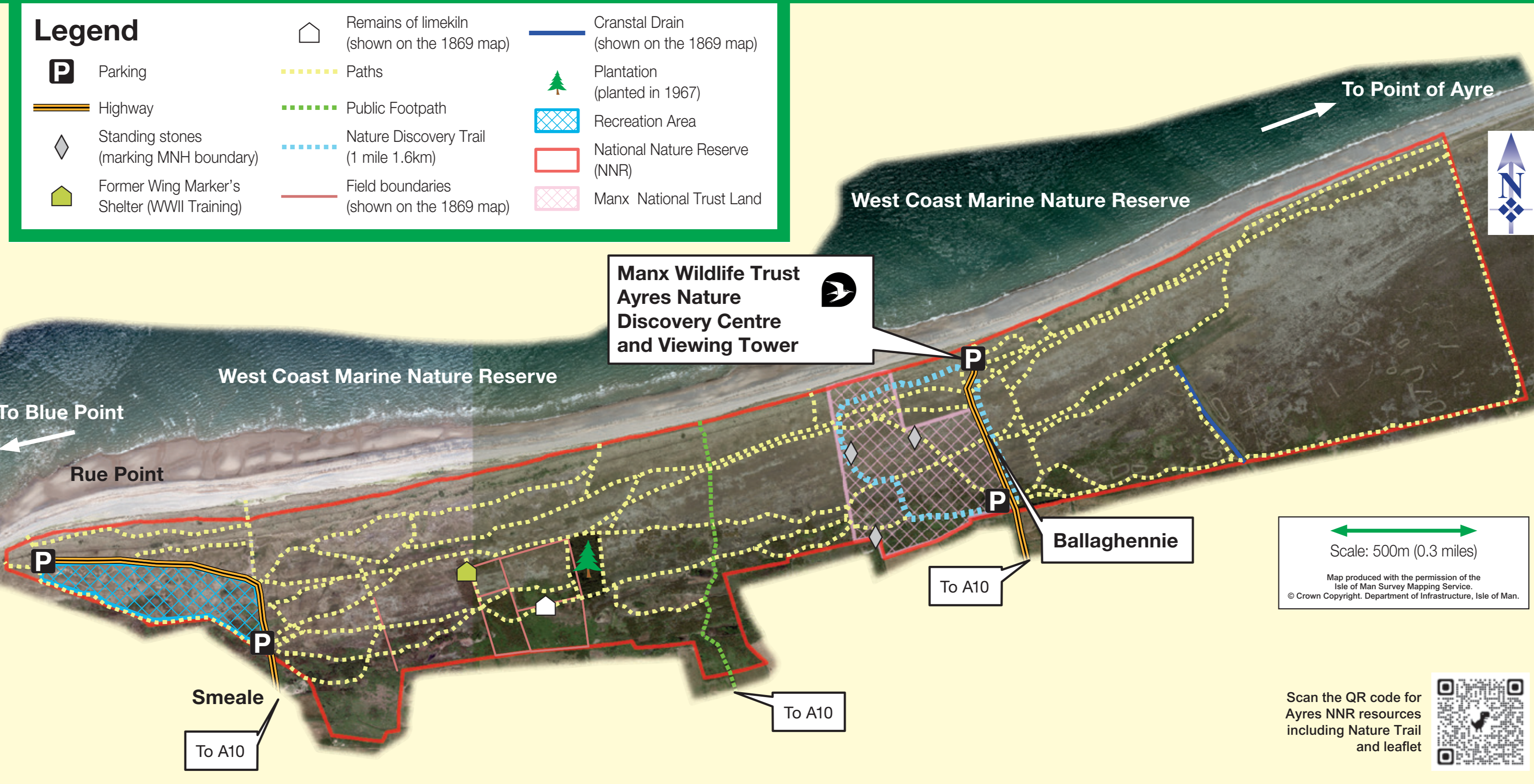
Curlew
Crottag



Meadow Pipit
Tweet Lheannagh



Skylark
Ushag Happagh



Plants

The Ayres has a rich and varied flora including several orchid species and the rare **Isle of Man Cabbage**. Good numbers of the **Early Purple Orchid** can be seen at the Ayres in early May. In June, masses of **Burnet Roses** add colour and fragrance to the heath. **Marram Grass** stabilises the sand dunes.



Early Purple Orchid
Magglyn Leah



Isle of Man Cabbage
Caayl Vannin



Burnet Rose
Drughag Veg



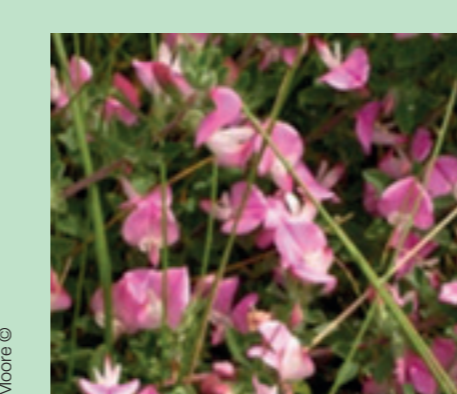
Marram Grass
Shaslagh



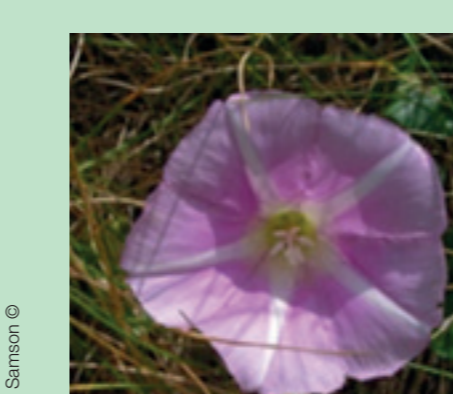
Sea Sandwort
Lus-gheinnee



Sea Holly
Hollyn Traie



Restharrow
Streng Bow



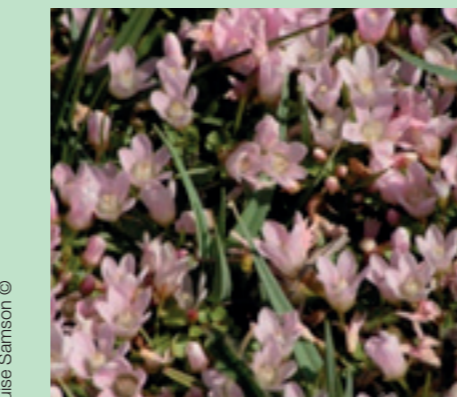
Sea Bindweed
Kiangleyder Traie



Pyramidal Orchid
Magglyn Cughleinagh



Northern Marsh Orchid
Magglyn Gorrym-jiarg



Bog Pimpernel
Follagher Curree



Hare's-foot Clover
Cass Mwaaee

The Ayres and Man

Over time people have used the natural resources available at the Ayres. Marram (Bent) was used to thatch roofs; beach stone to build houses, farm buildings and walls. Locally caught fish were a major food source and the heathland was grazed by sheep. Fields were created in some areas and attempts were made to cultivate the land by improving the soil with clay, seaweed and farmyard manure. These have now reverted back to heathland but the old field boundaries remain.

The Ayres was also used for gravel and sand extraction. The extraction of gravel from the raised beach at the Point of Ayre first started in 1925 and continues today. Sand was taken from the dunes on the NNR up until the 1980's and used to make concrete.

During the Second World War and afterwards, the Ayres was used as a military training area.

For Your Safety

Welcome. Enjoy your visit and help to look after the countryside. **BE SAFE.** You are responsible for taking care of yourself, children and dogs. Surfaces may be worn, uneven or slippery, wear suitable footwear and keep to defined routes. Please consider other people, livestock and wildlife and respect the Byelaws. Thank you.



Guided walks can be organised for groups with the DEFA Warden.

Rare Invertebrates

The Ayres is home to many rare and specialised invertebrate species, including over 30 that are classified as nationally-scarce within the British Isles.

The **Heath Bee-fly** is classified as vulnerable because, within the British Isles it only occurs at a few localities in Dorset and the Ayres. This small fly mimics a bee and lays its eggs in the burrows of solitary bees. You may be lucky to see one hovering and flicking its eggs into burrows in July/August.

Within the British Isles the **Scarce Crimson and Gold Moth** is only found at the Ayres and a few localities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and has been classified as endangered. This tiny moth flies in June/July and occurs in good numbers at the Ayres which is an important site for this rare legally protected species. Their larvae feed on thyme.

Also on site are a wide range of other invertebrates such as grasshoppers, bugs, butterflies, moths, flies, bees, ants, beetles, weevils, centipedes, millipedes, woodlice, spiders, slugs, snails and worms.



Scarce Crimson and Gold Moth
Lhemeen y Vooiragh



Six-spot Burnet
Burneid Shey-spohttagh



Dark Green Fritillary
Breckag Ghoo-glass



Fox Moth Caterpillar
Lhemeen Shynnagh



Heath Bee-fly
Quaillag-hellanagh Veg



Green Tiger Beetle
Caraig-heegyragh Gheayney

Sea Life off The Ayres

The Ayres NNR links to the adjacent West Coast MNR to provide integrated conservation management and protection. Large shoals of **Sand Eel** and **Sprats** attract both feeding sea birds and larger fish. **Harbour Porpoises** are regularly seen off the Ayres, and **Minke Whales**, **Common Dolphins** and **Bottlenose Dolphins** are seen occasionally. **Gannets** dive for fish in the summer, sometimes

in large, impressive groups and in the winter **Red-throated Divers** can be seen diving for fish from the surface. **Basking Sharks** are the second largest fish in the world, up to 11m in length, the size of a bus. They feed entirely on plankton, which they collect with their huge mouths. They are seen in the summer, occasionally in large groups. Inquisitive **Grey Seals** are regularly seen along the Ayres shore. **Velvet Swimming Crabs** can be found from the shore down to a depth of 70 metres. These crabs are voracious predators, attacking and eating anything they can, including other crabs. Dead animals and algae also feature in their diet.



Gannet
Gant



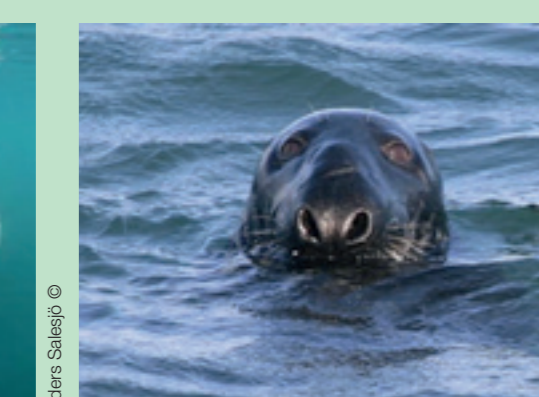
Sand Eel
Gibbin



Velvet Swimming Crab
Partan Snauee



Basking Shark
Sharkagh Souree



Grey Seal
Raun



Harbour Porpoise
Perkyn

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture - *Rheynn Chymmyltaght, Bee as Eiryns*

If you have any queries about the National Nature Reserve please contact the DEFA Ecosystem Policy Team on 01624 651577 or ecopolicy@gov.im or Manx National Heritage - *Eiraght Ashoonagh Vannin* on 648000 or enquiries.mnh@mnh.im