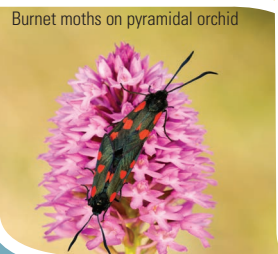


Sandwich and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve

The National Nature Reserve (NNR) is home to an amazing variety of plants and animals making it nationally and internationally important for wildlife. You can find more habitats here than anywhere else in the southeast. The mudflats, saltmarsh, beach, sand dunes, coastal scrublands and cliffs are home to dozens of rare species.

Pegwell Bay Country Park

The country park is an ideal starting point from which to explore the NNR. It's hard to imagine now, but for many years the country park was a landfill site! Since the late 1970s, careful management and livestock grazing have seen it flourish and it's now a haven for wildlife.



At the far end of the country park you can find the Stonelees Nature Reserve. This rare ancient dune pasture was a sand dune a matter of centuries ago. Today, slacks (damp hollows), sandy, calcium-rich soils and livestock grazing provide ideal conditions for a wide range of plants, including bee, pyramidal, common spotted and southern marsh-orchids. This abundance of wild flowers attracts a huge variety of insects, including over three hundred species of moth.



Tidal Habitats

Mudflats

At low tide large areas of mud and sand are exposed. It may look bleak and inhospitable to us, but this harsh environment is home to vast numbers of shellfish, worms and other marine animals. Particularly in winter, these attract spectacular flocks of feeding and roosting waders and wildfowl.

Many of the birds that visit the nature reserve have travelled vast distances. Some breed within the Arctic Circle and fly thousands of miles to spend the winter here. The bountiful food and mild winter climate make these amazing journeys worth the effort.

Wading birds like oystercatcher, ringed plover and redshank use the site throughout the year and a few nest. Sanderling, turnstone, golden and grey plover visit for the winter in nationally and internationally important numbers but return to their Arctic breeding grounds for the summer.



Saltmarsh

Beyond the range of most tides specially adapted salt-tolerant plants form saltmarsh. A relative newcomer to our shores, common cord-grass dominates large areas but there are many other plants growing here. Look for the distinctive mauve, daisy-like blooms of sea aster, purple carpets of sea lavender, and the eye-catching yellows of golden samphire. Although less colourful, glasswort, sea blite and sea purslane are other typical saltmarsh plants.

Coastal Habitats

Beach, sand dunes & dune pasture

A few ringed plover nest on the beach but little terns no longer breed, probably due to predation and human disturbance. Named after the town, its close cousin the Sandwich tern can be seen throughout the summer. In July, numbers of this species swell as they stop to feed and rest before returning to their winter quarters off the coast of Africa.

The roots of plants such as sea sandwort, sea couch and marram grass help to bind and stabilize the shifting sand dunes. Together with the ancient dune pasture further inland they form one of the finest dune systems in Britain. Several of the plants growing here are scarce elsewhere, including marsh helleborine, lizard orchid and bedstraw broomrape. Bright wave and restharrow are two rare moths associated with this habitat.



Sea cliffs & rocky coastline

Kent contains more than a third of Britain's coastal chalk and the cliffs at Pegwell are particularly important. They comprise many striking geological features including sea caves, stack pillars and tunnels along with numerous fractures, faults and cracks. At their base, wave-cut platforms often host feeding and roosting flocks of turnstone, making the Thanet coastline of international importance for this bird. Warm, south-facing sections are home to solitary bees and wasps which dig nest burrows into the soft rock.