

Rules and regulations in the salt marshes

In the salt marshes of the national park, the statutory rules of the National Park of Lower Saxony (NWattNPG) apply. The area of the core zone ("Ruhezone"), where the wildlife is especially strictly protected, can be enjoyed from the marked paths and trails there. Access to the buffer zone ("Zwischenzone") of the national park is generally not subject to any restrictions. However, special conditions apply during breeding and nursing periods, when the birds need peace and quiet. Thus, from 1st April to 31st July, it is only possible to access the salt marshes via the marked paths. With binoculars, you get a good view of the birds without disturbing them. Important: please keep your dog on a leash at all times!

You are welcome to enjoy the sea lavender and other plants of the salt marshes. Looking at them closely and smelling them is always allowed – but picking them is not!

Please also respect any additional local rules.



Parts of the salt marsh are flooded with almost every high tide

Experience the salt marsh

You can find out about guided expeditions through the salt marshes at the local National Park visitor centre or at the ranger station. A tour is the best way to learn exciting new things about this habitat, its development and wildlife.
www.nationalparkhaus-wattenmeer.de

sea lavender



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www.nationale-naturlandschaften.de



Nationalpark
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NIEDERSACHSEN



Life in the Salt Marsh

Neptune's front garden

Salt marshes number among the most beautiful habitats found in our national park and are especially deserving of our protection. Discover the particular characteristics of a salt marsh for yourself and learn how you can enjoy its beauty without disturbing the wildlife there.

Salt marshes – fascinating ecosystems between land and sea

Salt marshes are intertidal ecosystems. They occur at shallow tidal coasts under conditions of low water currents and continuous sedimentation.

When the elevation of the land increases beyond a critical level first pioneer plants can establish followed by low and high marsh plant species. Salt marshes are a unique habitat for numerous plants as well as animal species. Other important

Salt marsh in autumn

ecosystem services of salt marshes are their contributions to coastal protection and climate regulation. Salt marsh surfaces located in the “foreland” of sea walls reduce significantly the amount of wave energy and its impact on the coastline. Moreover, salt marshes are able to capture large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and to store it in their salty and anoxic soils, thus mitigating climate change.

Salt marsh plants – survival specialists

Salt marsh plants are flooded regularly by the saline waters of the North Sea. To survive under these stressful



conditions they have developed special life strategies and traits. Sea lavender for example excretes salt ions through glands while Samphire „dilutes“ the incoming ions resulting in enlargement of cells and succulence of the plant. In autumn the annual samphire plants turn red and die-off. Their numerous seeds are dispersed by tidal water currents. You are welcome to touch the plants, and to rub and smell them too – but please do not pick them or any part of them!

Salt marshes - habitat for arthropods

The rather special plants of the salt marshes provide homes for rather special creatures. About 400 species of arthropods live on the 25 most common species of salt marsh plants. Some of them are highly specialized: The sea lavender weevil depends for nutrition and reproduction on sea lavender plants. The intertidal rove beetle (*Bledius spectabilis*) feeds on algae growing on the marsh soil surface and burrows a breeding tube in the marsh soil.

Salt marshes – habitat for birds

Every year in spring and autumn, hundreds of thousands of migrating birds make use of the Wadden Sea salt marshes to rest and to feed before they continue their long journey. Birds that use salt marshes

as breeding habitat include oystercatchers, redshanks, meadow pipits, terns and gulls. If you choose to walk through the salt marsh here, please make sure that you keep to the designated paths at all times.

Eggs and chicks are well camouflaged; when in danger, young birds duck down against the ground, and their mottled brown juvenile plumage allows them to blend into the undergrowth. This form of camouflage works perfectly against animal predators. The bad news is that it is not nearly so effective against human threats: one careless step off the path can cost a young oystercatcher or redshank its life.



The behaviour of adult birds will give you a good indication as to whether you are getting too close to their nests or their young: they may take to the air aggressively or even attack. Alternatively, they may pretend that they are injured and fly clumsily around you in order to lure you away from the nest. In this case, please leave the area swiftly and leave the birds in peace as they deserve.



Intertidal rove beetle with breeding burrow (left side)



Samphire turning red in autumn

