



# **ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE**

## **WWT Castle Espie Wetland Centre**



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# Welcome

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WWT Castle Espie Wetland Centre is a wetland nature reserve and visitor attraction located just outside Comber, Co. Down on the shores of Strangford Lough. Open 363 days a year, our family-friendly site offers visitors of all ages and abilities a host of unforgettable wildlife encounters and beautiful scenery whatever the weather.

WWT founder Peter Scott's vision was to connect people with nature, so at Castle Espie Wetland Centre we make it a principle that our wetlands and wildlife are accessible to everyone.

The following information provides details of the facilities that we have and, in some cases, don't have.

We hope that this will allow all of our visitors to get the most from their visit. Please let us know if you experience any difficulties during your visit that are not covered by this information.

## Opening times and admission tickets

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WWT Castle Espie is open 7 days a week, 363 days a year. We only close on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Our opening times are:

**Visitor centre** - 10am-5pm.

**Reserve** - 10am-4.30pm.

**Kingfisher café** - 10am-4pm. Food is served until 3pm.

Admission tickets can be booked online in advance, or purchased from reception on the day of your visit. We offer free entry to essential carers when accompanying a paying visitor.

WWT members receive free admission to our wetland centre.

Find out more about [admission tickets](#).

# Accessibility at a glance

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## General

- Trained assistance dogs are welcome.
- Essential carers visit for free when accompanying a disabled visitor.
- There are 3 toilets with adaptations across the whole site.

## Access

- There is a large, free car park with 5 designated accessible parking spaces.
- There is step-free level access from the car park into the visitor centre.
- In the visitor centre, there is level access to:
  - the admissions desk
  - café
  - gift shop
  - toilets
  - the reserve
- Most paths around the reserve are flat and wide.
- We have 1 manual wheelchair and 2 mobility scooters available to hire free of charge for members of Shop Mobility. Please book these in advance of your visit by calling us on 028 9187 4146 or emailing [info.castleespie@org.uk](mailto:info.castleespie@org.uk).

## Induction loops

- We have induction loops fitted at the admissions desk and café counter.

## Noise

- There can be noise at times across our site (e.g. grass cutting equipment/pressure washers) and on-site vehicles (tractors, HGVs).
- If these may impact your visit, please ask our admission team who can help plan a quieter route for your day.

# Getting to WWT Castle Espie

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78 Ballydrain Road, Comber

Co. Down

BT23 6EA

## By car

- We are 2.5 miles from the centre of Comber on the Ballydrain Road – off the A22 Killinchy Road. The centre is well signposted with brown tourist signs.

## By public transport

- Our nearest bus stop is Killinchy Street, Comber – approx. 2.6 miles from the wetland centre.
- Visitors are advised that there is no footpath for pedestrians along the Ballydrain Road.

## By bike

- Our car park has bicycle parking and a toolkit station. Please bring your own lock.
- There is also a drinking water tap to refill water bottles.

## Parking

- We have a large free car park with 5 designated accessible spaces.
- The car park is gravel. It has level access to the main entrance.
- There are 2 spaces for electric vehicle (EV) charging.
- There are also allocated parking bays for coaches and minibuses and the back of the car park.





5 disabled parking bays at the front of the car park



2 EV charging points



Bicycle parking and toolkit station



# Arrival

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## Path to entrance

- The car park is gravel. From the front of the car park there is a flat, paved path to the entrance to the visitor centre.
- There is a short, flat bridge made from wooden boarding which crosses a small pond. Alternatively, the paved path continues around the outside of the pond.

## Main entrance

- The main entrance has two powered doors which can be opened via wheelchair-accessible buttons.
- Each door is 95cm wide.



Path from car park to visitor centre



Main entrance to visitor centre



# Getting around inside

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The visitor centre is a single-story building with an open plan layout across admissions, the gift shop, and café.

Access out to the rest of the site is via two powered doors which are 95cm wide.

## Admissions/Shop desk

- The desk is directly in front of the main entrance door.
- There is a lowered section at each side of the desk.
- Our friendly staff and volunteers are available to assist you and answer any questions you may have.
- There are information boards detailing activities and upcoming events.
- A free entry ticket is available to essential carers when accompanying a disabled visitor.



Admissions desk

## Soft play

- The soft play room is available for children under 115cm tall.
- It is located through a manual door, 75cm wide, off the gift shop.
- There is bench seating along one wall of the room.

## **Castle Espie Gallery**

- The gallery is accessed via the café courtyard which is flat and paved.
- There is a set of two manual doors into the gallery which are 90cm wide.
- The entryways to the gallery rooms are 86cm wide.

The gallery has a range of exhibitions throughout the year. Check our [what's on page](#) for upcoming exhibitions.

# Toilets

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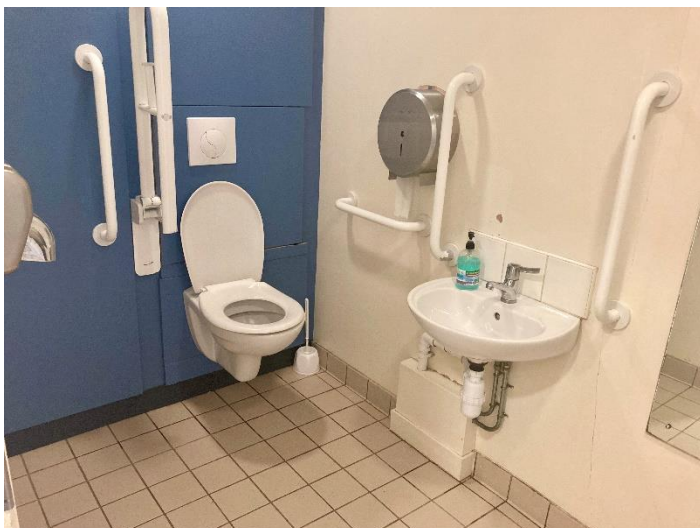
In the visitor centre, the main toilet facilities are located between the admissions desk and the Kingfisher café. There are additional toilets at the rear of the centre next to the soft play area.

## **Main toilets** (beside café)

There is one baby changing table in each of the male and female toilets.

There is one public toilet here for disabled visitors:

- Toilet door is 92cm wide.
- Door opens inwards to the right.
- Direction of transfer onto the toilet is right to left.
- Wall bars to the left and right of toilet and either side of sink.
- Drop-down grab bar to the right of the toilet.
- 75cm space on the transfer side of the toilet.
- 200cm space from the toilet to the far wall.
- Emergency pull cord to sound an alert.
- No baby changing table in this toilet (see additional toilets below).



Accessible toilet in main toilet facilities

## **Additional toilets (beside soft play)**

These toilets are located down a corridor off the visitor centre and are accessed via manual doors.

There is one baby changing table in the accessible toilet, two in the female toilets, and none in the male toilets here.

There is one public toilet here for disabled visitors:

- The doorway is 90cm wide.
- The door opens inwards to the left.
- The direction of transfer onto the toilet is left to right.
- Wall bars to the right of the toilet and a drop-down grab bar to the left.
- There is 150cm clear space between the door and the transfer side of the toilet.
- There is 125cm between the toilet and the opposite wall.
- There is an emergency pull cord to sound an alert.



Accessible toilet at the rear of the visitor centre



## Toilet in the Limekiln Observatory

- There is one toilet in the Limekiln Observatory accessed via two manual doors.
- The doors are 80cm wide.
- The toilet door opens outwards to the right.
- There is one wall bar on the right of the toilet and one on the back of the door.
- There is 110cm space from the wall to the transfer side of the toilet.
- The toilet is 110cm from the door.
- There is an emergency pull chord to sound an alert but this can only be heard within the Observatory. For further assistance, reception can be called on 028 9187 4146.



Toilet in the Limekiln Observatory

# Places to eat and drink

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## Kingfisher café

### Seating

There is flat, level access to many tables in the café. Further seating on the lower level can be accessed via a ramp.

The café has a mix of tables with booth/sofa seating and non-fixed chairs which can be moved to accommodate wheelchairs.

There is a powered door out to the café courtyard which is opened via a button. The courtyard has picnic tables with fixed bench seating. The courtyard is flat and paved.

### Service

Customers order from the counter. A member of staff will be happy to help visitors who require assistance to carry trays of food and drink to a table.

Staff are happy to assist by reading out menus and describing or locating products for those visitors with visual impairments.

### Dietary requirements

We will always endeavour to cater for vegetarian, gluten free (coeliacs), lactose free (dairy free) and vegan specific diets.

Please speak to a member of staff if you have any allergies or dietary requirements. For more information on what is available, please call us on 028 9187 4146 or email [info.castleespie@wwt.org.uk](mailto:info.castleespie@wwt.org.uk).

Free drinking water is available in the café.

### Other

There is sometimes gentle background music played at a low volume.



Kingfisher café

## Picnic tables

There are benches and picnic tables located across the reserve where visitors can rest and eat. These are often next to large, open grass areas or play areas.



Picnic area at Limestone Pavilion

# Getting around outside

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## Information and signage

All our exhibits, hides and open areas use signage to communicate our conservation efforts and display more information about our site.

We use images and text. Visitor maps are available from reception.

## Aviary

- The path to the Aviary from the visitor centre is paved with tarmac.
- There is a gentle downwards slope from the main entrance to the Aviary.
- There are large wooden push/pull gates into and out of the Aviary which keep our ducks and geese safely inside. These may require assistance. Please speak to our staff at reception or any of our Grounds team or volunteers who will be happy to help.
- The gates are 102cm wide.
- There are benches in the Aviary.
- As you leave the Aviary, there is a bridge with wooden boarding leading to the wild reserve. The bridge is 130cm wide or more. It is on a gentle incline.
- There are hand-washing sinks outside the Aviary.



Entrance to Aviary





Inside the Aviary

### **Duckery**

- The path to the Duckery from the visitor centre is flat and paved.
- There are push/pull gates into and out of the Duckery.
- There is a small decline on the path from the Duckery to the Aviary.
- There are handwashing sinks outside the Duckery (behind the visitor centre).

### **Wild reserve**

- There is a 100cm high gate on a latch to separate the reserve from the Aviary.
- The trail through the reserve is mostly flat and wide - suitable for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and buggies.
- There are some short bridges which are 190cm wide or more.
- There are large wooden push/pull gates on the path after the Crannog and at the reserve exit/return to visitor centre which may require assistance.
- These gates are 110cm wide.
- There are benches at intervals along the paths.



Path and bridge leading to  
Brent hide



Bridge after Crannog, leading  
to push gate

## **Brent hide**

- There is a gentle incline up to the Brent hide.
- The door is left open during opening hours. The entryway is 100cm wide.
- There is ample seating in the Brent hide including low sofas and moveable chairs.
- There are lowered viewing windows overlooking each of the three surrounding wetland habitats.



Inside the Brent hide

## Pond Zone

- Our Pondzone is open at various times throughout the year during staff led sessions only.
- Please visit our [what's on page](#) to check for Pond Dipping sessions and all other events.

## Crannog Roundhouse

- There is flat access to the Roundhouse.
- The door is 105cm wide.
- There is no seating.
- Windows are 105cm from the ground.



Entrance to Crannog Roundhouse



## **Limekiln Observatory**

- There is an incline up to the Limekiln Observatory. The path is 180cm wide.
- There is a manual door, 108cm wide.
- There are floor-to-ceiling windows on all sides of the Observatory.
- There are benches with armrests.
- There is a 100cm wide manual door out to the balcony which is 190cm wide or more.



Path up to Limekiln Observatory



Inside the Limekiln Observatory

## **Woodland**

- The path through the woodland is uneven and steep in parts which may not be suitable for users of wheelchairs or mobility scooters, or visitors with limited mobility.



- The Secret Swamp Walk at the bottom of the woodland is prone to flooding in winter.
- Please speak to a member of our team on arrival who can advise on a route which best suits your needs.
- To bypass the woodland trail, visitors can use the short return route which is a flat, wide path.

### **Wildwood play area**

- Wildwood is an open play area at the top of the woodland.
- There is a climbing tower and plenty of space to play.
- There are some picnic tables.

### **Sensory Garden**

- There is level access to the Sensory Garden through the courtyard.
- There is a 100cm tall gate on a latch.
- The paths in the Sensory Garden are narrow in parts. There is also a rill across part of the path (a channel for water to flow into the pond) which may restrict access for mobility scooters.



Sensory Garden path

### **Return to the visitor centre and exit**

The outdoor paths form a loop which will return you to the visitor centre. The exit to the car park is the same as the main entrance.

## **Customer Care Support**

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### **Wheelchairs and mobility scooters**

We have 1 manual wheelchair and 2 mobility scooters available to hire free of charge for members of Shop Mobility.

Please book these in advance of your visit by calling us on 028 9187 4146 or emailing [info.castleespie@org.uk](mailto:info.castleespie@org.uk).

### **Dogs**

Unfortunately, we can't allow dogs or pets of any kind on site, with the exception of trained assistance dogs, as our wildlife may become distressed. Trained assistance dogs are welcome but must be kept on their lead and under control at all times.

Please ensure any dog waste is removed. If any of our birds or animals' behaviour is affected by the presence of your dog, we respectfully ask that you move away from the area.

Please do not leave your dog in your car whilst visiting.

## Further information

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If you have any questions or need any more detail regarding anything included in our accessibility guide, please do get in touch.

Accessibility information for our private-hire function rooms is also available on request.

**Phone:** 028 9187 4146

**Email:** [info.castleespie@wwt.org.uk](mailto:info.castleespie@wwt.org.uk)

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