

FRIENDS OF RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN '77

Dear Friends,

Much is happening on the Reserve and the surrounding area which makes up the officially designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This SSSI comprises the area bounded by the Sea, the Rother, the Rye-Winchelsea Road and the Winchelsea Beach; the area which over the centuries since the great storm in the late 13th century, has been filled with the successive gravel ridges which have left Rye and Winchelsea high and dry.


Up till now the Reserve has consisted almost entirely of the coastal shingle strip but recently the two large farms, Castle Farm and Harbour Farm have changed hands and the prospect is now good for these two important areas coming into the Reserve. This will make no difference to the General Public; access will still be limited to the existing public footpaths and farming will continue as now. On the other hand the Warden will have unrestricted access to a large part of the SSSI and he, with the Management Committee, will be able to advise the owners on all matters connected with preserving the habitat, gravel extraction and any other development of the area. Harbour Farm is of particular importance as it includes the gravel pit extending into the Ternery Pool and the whole of the North Shore, none of which today is part of the Reserve. But, and there's always a but, the remaining gravel pits and pools are none of them part of these two properties. While there is no concern over the Long and Narrow pits, stretching from behind the Watch Cottage eastward to nearby Rye Harbour Church, as long as they remain under their present ownership some form of agreement to safeguard their future is needed. This is particularly so as the only other substantial water areas are on the Castle Water Estate which has already lodged a planning application before the Rother District Council. This seeks permission to use the roughly V shaped piece of water for sailing on the western half (S. of Camber Castle) and water skiing on the eastern half (roughly parallel with the Rye Harbour Road) with a nine hole golf course between and to the south of these two areas.

I attach a copy of a memorandum which the Management Committee had prepared for the County and District Councils before it had learned of the planning application. They have since been notified and their views called for. I feel sure all Friends will agree that on our already largely spoiled coast, every effort must be made to prevent this small but extremely important area from going the same way and will support the Management Committee in opposing this application.

Finally you will have noticed the Information Centre is now complete even though the displays have not yet been finished. It is generally felt that it looks extremely well, even if some of the more carping critics (such as your Chairman!) feel the roof could have been more neatly ribbed and constructed.

A small official opening is being planned for the early Summer. In the meantime the Warden has the key and can at least talk to visiting parties under cover and out of the blast of Rye Harbours apparently perpetual winter gales.

Yours sincerely,

  
Guy Crittall  
Chairman

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FROM THE WARDEN - AUTUMN '77

The mild weather of last winter certainly was well within the trend of recent years but this summer in contrast to the summers we've got used to, was cold and never really separated itself from the mild winter trend.

The cold north-easterly winds which predominated throughout the spring and early summer had little effect on the incoming migrant birds but as time progressed and the cold weather continued signs were noted in many areas, particularly coastal, of the poor breeding success of wader species, i.e. Ringed Plover and Redshank, and of unusual behaviour by predatory species such as Kestrel and Little Owl which, apparently having difficulty in finding their more usual prey reverted to the more easily available source of wader chicks, weak for want of invertebrate food which having been slowed in development by continual cold weather, was not in abundance until quite late on.

Many visitors to the reserve remarked on the scarcity of butterflies and dragonflies and the virtual absence of early pollinating insects. One insect however did occur in numbers, in fact huge numbers, wave after wave of them arrived off the sea during the summer - last year 'the year of the ladybirds', this year 'the year of the hoverflies', but the strange thing about these hoverflies was their dopiness; I don't think I've ever seen such a sluggish hoverfly. Not a healthy position to be in when eager birds are feeding hungry mouths. Many soon fell easy prey to the more quick-witted birds who learnt that these flies, evolved to look like wasps in their yellow and black banded colouration, had no sting.

On the reserve the nesting birds went ahead as normal despite the cold winds and early losses. Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers and Redshanks struggled on to rear their young against an additional threat, as if the cold wind weren't enough, of a marauding family of magpies with a specific taste for young waders. Common Terns failed to settle and nest on the islands at Ternery Pool due to high water levels and the occupation of the islands by loafing immature gulls. Good success however was had by the Common Terns at North Point Pit after having a close eye kept over them by the staff of Amey Roadstone, gravel extraction company and voluntary watchers at weekends. Little Terns got off to a good start with 15 pairs, the best number for many years, in a very scattered colony. However predation of eggs occurred in June and despite attempts to re-nest the final number of young reared was typical of recent years. Experiments were made using electric fencing to protect nesting terns from foxes and other night predators, this proved quite interesting and it is hoped to employ this additional method of protection on a larger scale next season.

Plants on the reserve had a bumper year, a reflection of last year's extraordinarily high amount of seed and this year's cool climate keeping the ground from drying out. The result being a profusion of Sea Kale, Viper's Bugloss, Beaked Hawksbeard, Ivy-leaved Toadflax, Red Valerian and Bird's Foot Trefoil to name just a few.

The contrast between the bleakness of the reserve in winter and the colourful array of flowers and calling birds in summer, is indeed a transformation. During the past few weeks it is this winter bleakness that has become increasingly apparent, the birds which come to us in summer to nest have nearly all gone, just a few Swallows and Wheatears linger on for an extra few days before following their kind to their respective winter quarters in Africa. Many are young and making the trip for the first time, many won't make it to Africa, let alone back here to breed next year.

As they leave, the winter birds arrive; Redwings, Fieldfares, ducks and swans, marking the completion of a seasonal cycle from when I first set eyes on the shingle ridges of Rye.

Yours sincerely

Richard Knight