



# NEWSLETTER

## The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

2 Watch Cottages, Nook Beach, Winchelsea, East Sussex, TN36 4LU.

Telephone: Rye (0797) 223862

A registered charity founded in 1973 to aid in the establishment and maintenance of the Nature Reserve within the Rye Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest, (known as the SSSI).

CHAIRMAN: Ian Rumley-Dawson. VICE CHAIRMAN: Clifford Percival. TREASURER: Pat Bonham.  
SECRETARY: Miss Liz Blackwell. MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Peter Philpot.  
COMMITTEE: Steve Denny, Bob Greenhalf, Peter Greenhalf, Frank Palmer, Mrs. Anne Yates,  
Dr. Barry Yates.

SPRING 1986.

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NUMBER 23.

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### NEW MOVE!

We have moved house! The old Warden's cottage at Rye Harbour has been sold and we have bought a larger bungalow at Nook Beach which is actually on the Reserve! For many years now we realised that the house at 1 Coastguard Cottages was not the best site for our Wardens to watch over the Reserve. For a start you could not even see the Reserve from that house, so that anything could have been happening out on the Reserve and if the Warden was at home, then he just would not know about it - this of course could have been some interesting wildlife feature that might have passed un-recorded; or it could have been some type of vandalism detrimental to the animals and plants on the Reserve.

So, when Jim Underwood very kindly offered to sell number 2 Watch Cottages to us, this was an opportunity we just could not miss. There were some who said that the place was too large or that it was too remote! However, those long-standing members who supported us during the formative years of the Reserve, will recall that in fact we used to rent this very cottage for our first few summer wardens, and they certainly found the place to be an ideal base from which to manage the Reserve because they could watch over the area even when they were off duty, not to mention the far greater numbers of species that could be monitored in the Cottage garden. Nowadays with many more records, files, sales goods and other equipment, we really do need large accommodation. Therefore it seems that the advantages far outweigh any other snags, but of course the main problem has been financial together with various other legal complications, all of which have taken some considerable time to reconcile; but they have all now been completed with great relief all round. Needless to say, we still have some hard work ahead to raise more money to pay back the loan which was needed to acquire Watch Cottage, but we hope that members will realise that this new move will prove to be of great benefit for the Reserve, and the lovely picturesque setting of the Cottage we hope will make a happy home for our Warden and his family.

On behalf of our members, I would like to thank Jim Underwood for his extreme patience in the lengthy negotiations that seemed to be never-ending! I must admit that at times I thought that the whole project would fall flat, and some of us were at great despair. However, with bulldog like tenacity, Clifford Percival (our Vice Chairman) kept on hounding the "powers that be" to sort out plans, rights of way, boundaries and other impediments. Our grateful thanks to Clifford for all his hard work, and to John Ball who very kindly stepped in at the last minute to straighten out all the legal documentation. Finally, our sympathies must go to Barry and Anne Yates for all the delays and turmoil that they have had to endure over the last six months while all these house negotiations were going on. Hopefully they will still be able to keep in contact with their previous neighbours at Rye Harbour, as it is only a small step for them to Watch Cottage, but it is a giant leap forward for the Reserve!

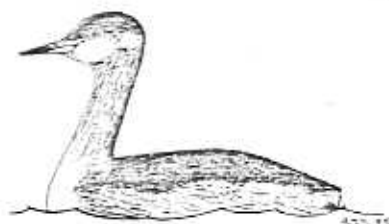
*A drawing by Barry of the Watch Cottages, ours is on the left.*

*Please note the new address shown in the heading of this Newsletter. The telephone number remains the same.*



WARDEN'S REPORT.

Dr. Barry Yates.



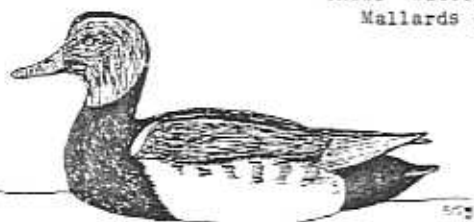
1986 has already become a memorable year for the Nature Reserve, with several new developments producing results and harsh weather testing the resilience of the birds and visitors to the Reserve. First the birds and the weather. The year started very wet and generally mild and, although fairly quiet on the bird front, provided some notable visitors; single Glaucous and Little Gulls, up to 6 Ruff, a Bittern and a Dartford Warbler. In Rye Bay fishermen noted great increases in the small fish during January and this attracted many fish eating birds within range of the shore; 150 Red-throated Divers, 2 Black-throated Divers, 20+ Great Crested Grebes, a Red-necked Grebe (as illustrated above right), a Gannet, a Shag, numerous Guillemots and a few Razorbills.

During February, 25 of the 28 days resulted in freezing conditions and with the persistent, biting, easterly winds, the temperature dropped to -12°C, so there was much bird movement and many probably perished. Most Lapwings and Golden Plover moved away (where to?) as the ground became deeply frozen, and after a long stay at Ternery Pool, the Long-tailed Duck left on 8th February, when the water iced over. Other wildfowl did find some refuge in the area; 57 Greylag Geese, 170 Shelduck, 300 Wigeon, 6 Gadwall, 80 Teal, 460 Mallard, 12 Pintail, just 1 Shoveler, 180 Pochard, 80 Tufted Duck, 76 Scaup, 1 Eider, 45 Common Scoter, 7 Goldeneye, 27 Snow, 2 Red-breasted Merganser and 7 Goosander. The very cold weather lasted until 4th March, and inhibited breeding activity in the early nesting species, but within two days of the arrival of warmer westerly winds, there was a great flourish of displaying. The Beach Reserve then became alive with sound; Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers with their "butterfly" flights, Lapwings "tumbling", Skylarks and Corn Buntings singing, Mallards courting, Redshanks "yodelling" and Black-headed Gulls squabbling.

As this Newsletter is being put together, the first of the Spring migrants should be arriving and below I have given an indication of their expected arrival dates.

Male Pochard (left).

All the illustrations in this edition of the Newsletter are by Barry Yates.



EARLIEST DATES OF SPRING MIGRANTS AT RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE.

3 = March.	4 = April.	5 = May.	6 = June.
Garganey	6/3 - 31/5	Turtle Dove	20/4 - 16/5
Whimbrel	3/4 - 24/4	Cuckoo	12/4 - 5/5
Greenshank	14/4 - 27/6	Swift	25/4 - 2/5
Common Sandpiper	24/4 - 7/5	Sand Martin	12/3 - 29/4
Sandwich Tern	19/3 - 8/4	Swallow	12/3 - 19/4
Common Tern	5/4 - 21/4	House Martin	13/4 - 26/4
Little Tern	4/4 - 21/4	Yellow Wagtail	31/3 - 16/4
Black Tern	13/4 - 12/5	Black Redstart	6/3 - 17/4
		Wheatear	8/3 - 31/3
		Sedge Warbler	9/4 - 24/4
		Reed Warbler	4/4 - 12/5
		Lesser Whitethroat	26/4 - 6/5
		Whitethroat	10/4 - 2/5
		Blackcap	24/3 - 22/4
		Chiffchaff	13/3 - 3/4
		Willow Warbler	30/3 - 16/4
		Firecrest	21/3 - 10/4
		Spotted Flycatcher	16/4 - 24/5

The first Spring migrant this year, a striking male Black Redstart, arrived in the garden at Watch Cottage on 16th March and stayed a few days.

ANSWERS TO BIRD BOX QUIZ.

Nearly 40 entries were received for this quiz in the last Newsletter, and about half of them had all the answers correct. The lucky winner of the nestbox was S.C.Ramsden of New Romney.

1. Small thrush = REDWING.
2. Country woodpecker = YAFFLE.
3. Woodpecker with a "jynx" = WRYNECK.
4. No cheese with the bread = YELLOWHAMMER.
5. Sentinel of the marsh = REDSHANK.
6. Ruff's mate = REEVE.
7. Nest is a soggy, floating heap = GREBE.
8. Golden ringed = PLOVER.
9. Bonnie = GREAT SKUA.
10. A famous wizard = MERLIN.

And of course the magic letters down the centre of the puzzle spelt out RYE HARBOUR.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

- Saturday, 26th April, 4.00pm - Walk to see Whimbrel and other roosting birds.
- Saturday, 3rd May, 7.30pm - Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, see further details in the Agenda attached to this Newsletter.
- Sunday, 8th June, 2.00pm - Walk to see breeding birds and summer flowers.
- Sunday, 3rd August, 10.00am - Walk to see Ternery Pool at high tide.
- Thursday, 26th June, - Coffee Morning at George Hotel, High Street, Rye.

All of the above mentioned walks start from the Information Centre in the Martello Tower carpark at Rye Harbour.

DEVELOPMENTS AT THE WADER POOL.

Barry Yates.

From money raised through last year's QUILT RAFFLE and a grant from the Rotary Club of Rye and Winchelsea, it has been possible to create a new feature on the Reserve, as briefly described in our previous Newsletters. The idea was to make a shallow water area for wading birds that would be close to the carpark, and therefore accessible to most people, including the disabled.

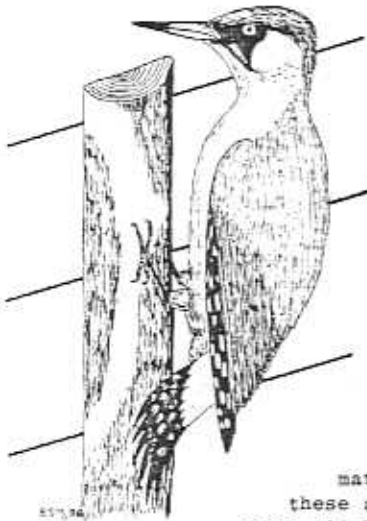
In March 1985, the area was levelled and embanked by the neighbouring farmer, Mr. Douglas, and a 3m. deep well was sunk using huge rings donated by Spun Concrete Ltd.. In June 1985, a vast quantity of clay was dumped in the prepared site by the Southern Water Authority (440 lorry loads), and much effort has since been expended to level this. In November 1985, an electricity cable was laid to the Pool to power a small water pump, which has also provided the extra benefit of being able to run the electric fences more efficiently to protect some of the vulnerable breeding species. The pump will keep the area of the new Pool flooded at a very small cost.

At first the whole area looked like a messy building site, but gradually it is beginning to look more natural, as a few plants begin to grow up to heal the scar, and the place attracts more and more birds. Hopefully, most of the Pool will have been completed during the Easter Work Party this year. Then it will be left to settle down during the rest of the year. The next project will be to plan a hide that overlooks the Pool, so that visitors can watch the feeding birds without disturbing them too much. But for now the breeding season is fast approaching and the priority will be to get the electric fences operating correctly, so that the ground nesting birds will have some protection from predators.

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A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*).

Barry Yates.



Woodpeckers are usually associated with woodlands, but one, the Green Woodpecker, frequently feeds on the ground away from trees. On the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve single birds often feed on the insects, especially ants, that live in the shingle. When disturbed, these birds resort to fence posts or "telegraph" poles where a good, clear view of them can be made. They are very colourful birds, with bright red crown, black face, green wings and back, bright yellow rump and black tail. Male Green Woodpeckers are distinguished by their red moustache-centres. In flight they have a bounding undulating action with alternating flapping and gliding, and when perched the tail supports much of the weight. The toes are also specialised for climbing with two pointing forward and two backward. The call is a distinctive ringing laugh that is referred to as a "yaffle", giving rise to its country name and the answer to question 2 in the last Newsletter quiz. Another country name for it is RAIN BIRD, because it can often be seen probing for insects on grass just after a shower of rain. This is probably due to the fact that rain will bring some insects closer to the surface of the ground to escape being drowned, but it also makes it easier for the Green Woodpecker to get at them.

However, these woodpeckers cannot breed on the Reserve, as they need old mature or rotting trees in which to chissel out their cavity nestholes, and so these are just not available on the Reserve, but of course there are plenty of such trees slightly further inland. This may account for the fact that they are not quite so often seen around on the Reserve during the Spring and Summer months, while they are busy breeding among the trees of woodlands or bordering farmland. It is an interesting bird to see and hear.

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FRIENDS' NEW SALES GOODS.

Ian R-D.

In a continuing effort to raise more funds for the Reserve, as well as to encourage a wider appreciation of its wildlife, we have produced some new sales goods which we hope will appeal to members, in both senses of the word. They will be available to members for the first time at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 3rd May 1986. They include a china mug with one of Bob Greenhalf's excellent illustrations round the outside; it shows a view of part of the Reserve with associated animals and plants of the area. Other items include a pack of 6 green notelets with envelopes, again depicting a black and white ink drawing of the Reserve. The prices of these and other new sales items will be announced at the A.G.M. and they will be available after the A.G.M. from Watch Cottage, as well as from some other outlets.

So please help us to raise funds in this pleasant "souvenir" way by buying a few of these attractive items for yourself or friends - they will make good presents and of course they will bring back memories of happy days spent watching wildlife on the Reserve.

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TERN WATCH.

Peter Philpot.

Once again, Joan and I will be co-ordinating this important wardening scheme, from early May to mid August. The exact dates of course will be notified to us by the terns when they arrive! Anyone who would like to take part in this essential protection of the vulnerable nesting areas - please phone us at Rye (0797) 225998 or come along and see me at the A.G.M.. We particularly need people to cover the period from 11.00am to 3.00pm on Sundays. Thank you in anticipation of your kind help in this work.

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A CLOSER LOOK AT DANISH SCURVYGRASS (*Cochlearia danica*).

Barry Yates.



The four species of Scurvygrass are low growing plants with small white 4-petaled flowers and fleshy leaves that are mainly found by the seaside. The Danish Scurvygrass can be distinguished by its ivy-shaped lower leaves and all its leaves are stalked. At Rye Harbour it grows mainly by the side of the roadway that runs from the River Mouth towards the old Lifeboat House. There they are regularly washed with saltwater from the lorries carrying shingle, and they thrive on this, whereas most other plants would curl up and die. The flowering period is long, starting in some years in early March and extending through until July, providing an early source of nectar for many insects.

The plant has oils rich in vitamin C and, because it grows around the coast, it was discovered by 16th century sailors as a cure for scurvy, before fresh food was available to them on long voyages. It has an unpleasant taste, so it was made up as a medicine heavily flavoured with spices, or eaten in sandwiches. However, it quickly lost favour when other tastier sources of vitamin C became available in the 19th century.

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HIGH-TECH MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY.

Ian R-D.

Some members may have noticed that the envelope containing this and their previous Newsletter was in type! Well, for some time we have been researching the best and cheapest methods to keep track of our greatly expanding membership. We have to deal with more than 600 addresses for about four different mailings/deliveries per year, which totals some 2,400 envelopes!!! So we really had to try to streamline the operation somehow and get away from handwritten addresses, which used to take our team of scribes absolute ages to complete each time, and they could incorporate a variety of amusing (or annoying) errors, but seriously folks - they did a grand job, but it really was tedious and frustrating. When dealing with a large number of people, it is amazing how many changes of address occur, all of which of course have to be kept up-to-date, so that members can get their Newsletters as soon as they are printed. We know of one member who has moved 4 times during the last year! So we needed a system over which we could have full control and it needed to be cheap and easy to run, not take up too much space, and of course one that would not become obsolete after about two year. Computers failed on all these points, and therefore we acquired the well tried and tested Addressograph system, which consists of a metal plate for each address. These plates are then run through a special stamping machine which bangs the whole name and address onto the envelope. All very simple and very much faster. Each plate also acts as a filed record in itself, any of which can be instantly accessed for up-dating. They also have the advantage in that once the plate has been made up, the address is correct forever more. However, if you find that we are NOT showing YOUR address correctly plus the post code, then please let our Membership Secretary know immediately - this means that you will get your Newsletter sooner and, hopefully, it will please your postman.

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A REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER.

Peter Philpot.

Please note that subscriptions for 1986 are due on 1st May. Those members who wish to pay at the A.G.M. can help immensely by filling-in the Membership Renewal form beforehand. This will save time and congestion at the meeting.

Please consider the question of what turns £1 into £1.45 or £10 into £14.50 ? If you should need more advice about a Bankers Order or Covenants, then Pat Bonham, our Treasurer, will also be available at the meeting to answer your questions. Finally, it would be very helpful if all subscriptions could be paid BEFORE the end of July, as this will save the effort and added expence of sending out reminder letters in August. Please help us to help you to help the Reserve.

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MEMBERSHIP DRIVE.

Peter Philpot.

Let us all try very hard to double our membership by enrolling a new member during this year. Most of us will probably take a relative, friend or neighbour to visit the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve at some time. So please make them fully aware of all the problems that we have to face to try to improve the area for wildlife; show them the tranquility and beauty of the place, as well as the tremendous variety of species that can be seen at any time of the year - particularly at close quarters from the comfort and convenience of our hides. We really do need as much support as we can get to keep the place going and to finance new improvement projects. We like to think that we are one of the most progressive wildlife reserves in the Southeast of England - we have many features which are just not seen at other areas. In fact many serious naturalists now realise this and they regularly come long distances to study our techniques and the species of plants and animals that we protect. We hope that you will feel as strongly as we do and continue to form part of the team, as a member to help support the survival of wildlife for the future. Please try to sign-up more people to assist us in this important and enjoyable work, if you can persuade them to visit the Reserve, then we are sure they will begin to get the message and they will see for themselves that wildlife really is worth their support as well.

Membership forms are available in the hides on the Reserve. If they have run out, then please contact the Warden at the address shown in this Newsletter heading on page 1.

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