



# 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: David Marshall.  
SECRETARY: Miss Liz Blackwell. MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Peter Philpot.  
COMMITTEE: Steve Denny, Bob Greenhalf, Peter Greenhalf, Frank Palmer, Mrs. Anne Yates,  
Dr. Barry Yates.

SPRING 1987.  
\*\*\*\*\*

NUMBER 26.  
\*\*\*\*\*

### WARDEN'S REPORT.

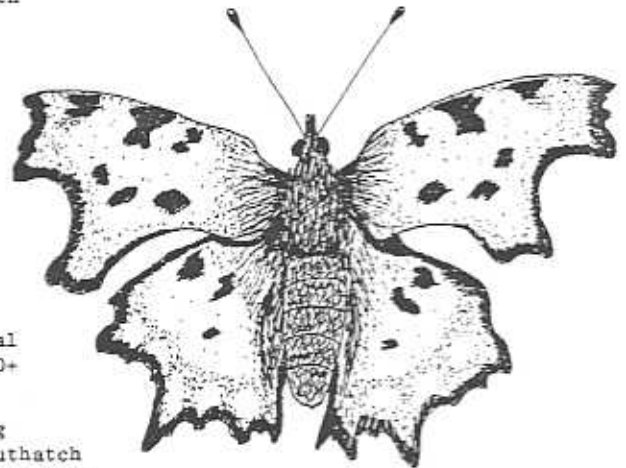
Dr. Barry Yates.

The year started with cold and dry weather, much like my previous two years at Rye Harbour, and it brought with it the many birds from Europe and Scandinavia predicted in our last Newsletter. The weather has been dominated by high pressure systems "stuck" over Scandinavia, giving very cold dry easterly winds bringing unusual birds, but threatening our more common wintering species, especially the small birds. During the harshest weather, finches and buntings were concentrated around feeders put out for Partridges. This made for spectacular birdwatching with large flocks of Corn Buntings, Greenfinches, Linnets and Skylarks, and smaller groups of Yellowhammer, Brambling, Reed Bunting and up to 3 aptly named Lapland Buntings. Unusually there were no records of Snow Buntings. Several Birds of Prey exploited these concentrations and it was fascinating to watch Merlin and Sparrowhawks chasing flocks and singling out weaker individuals and occasionally catching them.

Ternery Pool (TP) was completely frozen over from 12th to 26th January, and all the gravel pits were completely frozen for many days, so that the Little Grebes will have suffered yet again, (breeding numbers at TP:- 1984 = 7 prs.; 1985 = 5 prs.; 1986 = 3 prs.; so how many this year - only 1 pr. so far). When open water reappeared at TP it was visited regularly by up to 5 Smew and 6 Goldeneye, including the splendid adult males of both species. There has been (and still is) the usual great variety of wildfowl around, but exceptionally there were 15 Velvet Scoter in January and a male Red-crested Pochard in February.

Among the wading birds there has been a single Black-tailed Godwit at TP, up to 40 Bar-tailed Godwits on the shore, including one in full breeding plumage in January! Occasional Spotted Redshanks and Ruff as well as the usual roosts of 800+ Curlew and 520 Oystercatchers.

The small wood adjacent to the Reserve provided a contrasting variety of birds such as Treecreepers, Redpoll, Firecrest, Nuthatch (very unusual here), Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Long-eared Owls, and for one day only 2 Waxwings. But my most memorable day in the wood was a very mild March 1st, while watching the owls, when a Comma Butterfly rested briefly on a gate, warming in the sun. It was easy to imagine spring was on its way; but no another high pressure system paused over Scandinavia to extend the cold weather.



*Comma Butterfly*

STOP PRESS - 21st March = first migrants seen: Sandwich Tern, Wheatear and Black Redstart!

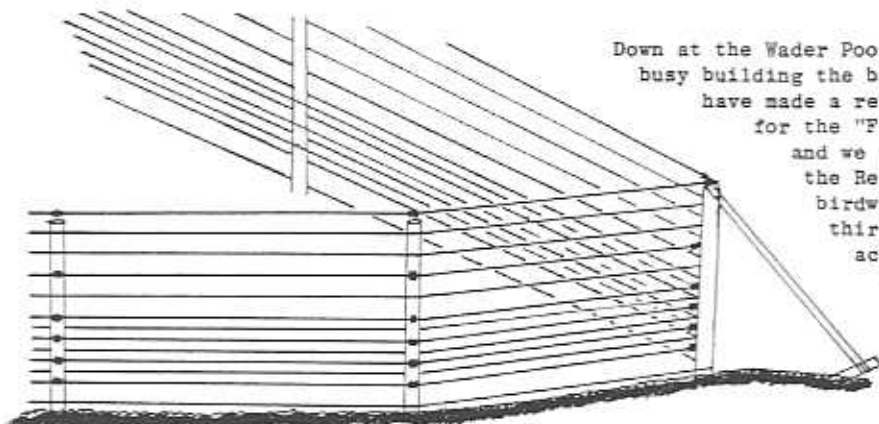
\*\*\*\*\*

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.

Barry Yates.

Last year the Reserve entered a Conservation Competition run by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation/BBC/Woolwich Building Society. The entry was in the category of "Management of a Threatened Habitat" and was based on the protection of the wildlife on the shingle through the Electric Fencing, the voluntary Tern Watch, and management carried out at Ternery Pool and elsewhere on the Reserve. We were successful in this category, winning a prize of £1,000 and will feature in a daytime BBC programme in May, when an overall winner of several categories will be announced with a further prize of £5,000.

The prize of £1,000 has already been spent on 1,500 kg. of wire that is currently being used to renew, improve and extend 2 of the 4 electric fences. Much of this work is currently being carried out by the Community Programme (Manpower Services Commission), and without this help it would not have been possible to contemplate such a major project.



Down at the Wader Pool, the Southern Water Authority has been busy building the base and approach for the new hide. They have made a really good job of it, and it just remains for the "Friends" to build the actual hide on top and we will have another valuable new addition to the Reserve which will benefit the dedicated birdwatcher and casual visitor alike. This third hide for the Reserve will be much more accessible, only 600m. from the carpark at Rye Harbour, and will be specially adapted for wheelchairs, so that everyone has the opportunity to watch some of the wildlife on the Reserve in comfort.

We extend our grateful thanks to the Southern Water Authority for their excellent co-operation and hard work in making this project possible.

An example of our now extensive electric fencing.

**MATHMANIA - ANSWERS.**

For those who may not be quite so familiar with the various aspects of the Reserve, here are the answers to the puzzle in our last Newsletter:-

Yellow-horned Poppy = 4 petals (plus) Little Tern pairs in 1986 = 70 (plus) number of flaps at front of each hide = 6 (divide) Ringed Plover clutch = 4 (divide) Lagomorphs = 2 Hare and Rabbit (minus) number of seeds in Sea Kale pod = 1 (divide) number of Charadrius = 3 Kentish Plover, Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover (minus) chimney stacks at Watch Cottages = 3, brings the total sum to 0 which is the number of Sand martins that nested at Rye Harbour in 1986.

I wonder how many people guessed the answer anyway? In fact the number of Sand Martins has greatly declined over the last three years over the whole of Britain. The RSPB guesstimated that in 1986 about 80% of our Sand Martins did not return to breed in Britain!!!

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.**

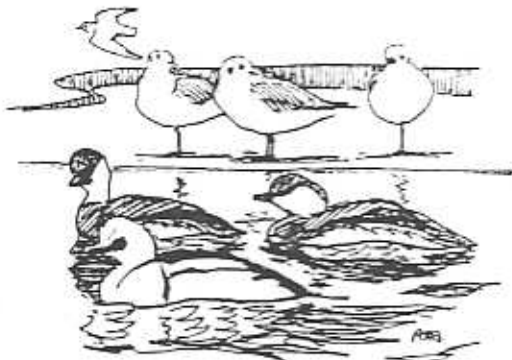
Friday & Saturday 17th & 18th April 1987: WORK PARTY - meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre at Rye Harbour carpark or later on the Reserve. Bring suitable garden tools, lunch and binoculars.

Saturday, 25th April 1987: GUIDED WALK to Ternery Pool and the Wood to look for migrant birds. 10.00am to 3.00pm. Meet at the Information Centre in the Rye Harbour carpark, with lunch, etc..

Saturday, 2nd May 1987: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, at 7.30pm in the Winchelsea Beach Village Hall, Sea Road, Winchelsea Beach, East Sussex.

Saturday, 13th June 1987: COFFEE MORNING from 10.00am to 12 noon, in the United Reform Church Hall, Robertson Street, Hastings. Bring and Buy, cakes and other sales goods, etc.. Helpers please contact Miss Liz Blackwell, Bowerhurst, Bower Close, St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex. Telephone = Hastings 753016.

Sunday, 21st June 1987: SUMMER GUIDED WALK meet at 6.00pm in the Information Centre in the Rye Harbour carpark. This walk will be about 6 miles long and will finish at sunset.



Smew in foreground, as recently seen on the Reserve, with Black-headed Gulls in background.

**TERN WATCH.**

Peter Philpot.

By the time you receive this Newsletter, some of our nesting terns will already have arrived back on the Reserve. We shall be arranging for the Reserve to be voluntarily wardened between mid-May right through continuously to mid-August. Anyone who would like to take part in this essential protection of the nesting areas, on a shift basis, can either phone me at Rye (0797) 225998 or see me at the Annual General Meeting, to fix some dates and times. We hope that the new fences will make this year more interesting and more rewarding than last year. I would like to thank you for your anticipated support of this vital scheme.

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.**

Peter Philpot.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that we have had a very successful year, having increased the number of members from 576 to 769. We have however regrettably lost 36 members for one reason or another. The subscriptions range from the stipulated minimum of £2 to a magnificent £100 per year. The average subscription working out at around £5. A third of our subscriptions are paid by Bankers Order and approximately three-quarters of these are Covenanted, which enables us to add some £570 extra money at no extra cost to our friends. I am sure you will all agree that this is a very useful extra sum, and should any of you wish to pay by Bankers Order and Covenant, then the appropriate forms will be available at the Annual General Meeting. Alternatively, these forms can be obtained at any time from myself or the Warden. Finally, let us all try to make 1987 the year when our membership exceeds one thousand. Please get your friends to join our Friends.

A CLOSER LOOK AT GODWITS.

Barry Yates.

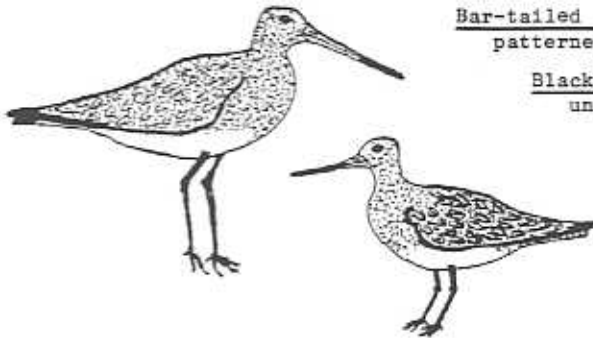
Godwits are large, long-legged wading birds with long straight bills. There are two British species; Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), and both can be seen at the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve for most of the year. They can be very difficult to separate if you do not see them regularly, but these few notes may help.

Bar-tailed Godwit:- Short legged, slight upturned bill, strongly patterned back, no distinct wing bar, feeds on shore.

Black-tailed Godwit:- Very long legged, longer straight bill, uniform grey back, broad white wing bar in flight, usually feeds around freshwater pools and marshes.

In breeding plumage both species attain a rich chestnut colour around the head, neck and breast, and the Bar-tailed Godwit has this colour continuing down and behind the legs. It is in this plumage that both species look so spectacular and take on a really exotic appearance.

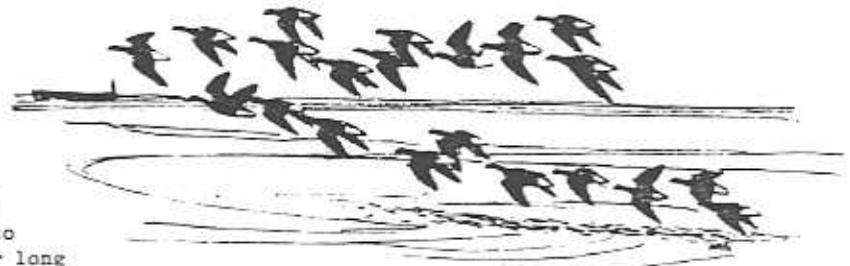
The illustration shows Black-tailed Godwit on the left, and Bar-tailed Godwit on the right.



\*\*\*\*\*  
BRENT GEESE PASSING RYE BAY.

Ian R-D.

Bob Greenhalf's drawing on the right shows a small flock of Dark-breasted Brent Geese winging their way over the sea just off the shoreline of the Reserve; probably on their migration flight from Chichester or Pagham Harbour in West Sussex, to their breeding grounds in Arctic Russia in Siberia. These birds usually fly very close to the water, even following the contours of the waves where there is probably less wind resistance, as they need to conserve as much energy as possible during their long migration flights. Their exact routes are difficult to plot exactly, but they most likely pass through the Baltic



Sea, then over Finland to fly along the coastline of Northern Russia, where the sea estuaries provide important feeding stations along the route. As they arrive on the tundra breeding grounds, snow and ice still blanket the landscape and they may have to fly on to find areas which are snow-free either by melting or where the powerful Arctic winds have cleared a site for them, so that they can build their down-lined nests tucked well into the sparse tundra vegetation left over from the previous summer. It is a harsh landscape but one that provides ample food for growing goslings, and, just as important, it is an area which is little disturbed by man or other predators. In fact the Brents have now had several very successful breeding years in Siberia during the last decade, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of them passing through Rye Bay and arriving back in West Sussex each winter. In the 1950s only about 200 Brents could be seen there each winter, now in the 1980s the numbers are in excess of 10,000 in the West Sussex areas! However, it only needs a few hard summers in the Arctic, when snow still may cover the ground so that the Brents cannot breed at all - and the numbers come crashing down again, or man may destroy some of their important feeding stations on the route. This is why nature conservation has to be international; birds are the ultimate travellers; and habitat protection is their passport to survival.

\*\*\*\*\*  
SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS.

Peter Philpot.

Please note that subscriptions for 1987 are due on 1st May 1987. These can be paid to me at the Annual General Meeting, but please fill in the Membership Renewal Form at the bottom of this page, cut it off and have it ready to give to me at the meeting, as this will save a lot of time and congestion in the hall. Cheques etc. should be made payable to the FRIENDS OF RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE.

If you are not able to attend the A.G.M., then please send your Renewal Subscription to the Membership Secretary at the address shown on the form below. (Please DO NOT send it to the Warden).

It would be much appreciated if all Renewals could be paid by the end of May, as this could save us a lot of money and time in sending out reminders. We would also be able to use the subscriptions earlier and it could enable us to assess our expenditure more accurately for future projects. Please note that those members who have newly joined after 1st January 1987, need not pay their first Renewal Subscription until 1st May 1988.

----- CUT ALONG HERE -----