



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.

W I N T E R 1 9 8 7 / 8 8 .

N U M B E R 2 8 .

WARDEN'S REPORT.

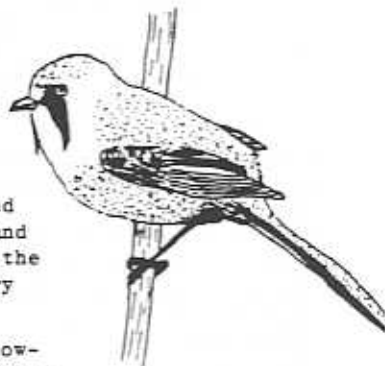
Dr. Barry Yates.

Last year the weather played a leading role in the fortunes of the wildlife of the Reserve, but despite the cold winter, late spring and poor summer, the memorable month was October, with its huge rainfall (11 inches) and the tremendous storm on the 16th. The Reserve survived virtually intact with all three hides remaining (except for the felt of one roof), and only a few old posts and small Hawthorn bushes blown over. I am sure you would have shared my apprehension on looking out at the recently completed hide at the Wader Pool the day after the storm, but all was well and I hope by now you have all recovered from the damage.

The annual cycle of nature follows a similar pattern, but fortunately no two years are alike. It is this variety that provides the everlasting interest of our Nature Reserve, which adapts to annual and seasonal extremes of the environment. We are fortunate in having a continual turnover of birds throughout the year, and I am fortunate in being able to record some of the comings and goings.

SEPTEMBER and AUGUST - were unusual for the poor passage of wading birds, suggesting that their breeding in the far north may not have been successful, but to balance this most passerines seemed to have produced a very good number of young.

OCTOBER and NOVEMBER - the usual very large flock of Greenfinches was absent after the October storm - perhaps the wind blew away their main food of Sea Kale seed - and consequently sightings of the spectacular Merlin were fewer and other regular predators such as Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl were scarce. The only unusual species brought in by the storm was a Little Bittern on 17th October, but it was virtually impossible to see, even knowing where it was, then a month later a Bittern was noted at Ternery Pool. The huge rainfall resulted in a very high water table across the Reserve with an attractive pool on the Flat Beach visited by waders, ducks and Brent Geese. At Ternery Pool the small islands disappeared and so it was less popular with roosting Oystercatchers and the surface feeding ducks, but did attract a very good variety of diving ducks - Tufted Duck = up to 105, Pochard = 19, Scaup = 19, Goldeneye = 4, Smew = 1, Ruddy Duck = 1. Here they gave close views so that all species and ages of these similar ducks could be carefully compared. Almost every year during these two months the area is visited by the elusive Bearded Tit (as illustrated on the right), which is restricted to the reed beds. In the dense reeds it is difficult to see and is best located on still days when its "pinging" calls can be heard. This year it was scarce with only a maximum of 6 noted on the 7th/8th November 1987.



Bearded Tit

DECEMBER - the early month was dominated by cold, easterly winds and although the temperature did not drop below -3°C the Ternery Pool did freeze right over and so the diving ducks departed for the Long Pit. The east wind was cold, but dry and the level of the Pool dropped so that once again the roosting waders returned to the islands. An unusually common species this winter was the Robin, with almost every bush having its own bird.

Despite all the hostile weather, a few plants continued to flower with a few Yellow-borned Poppies still colourful into late November and Daisies and Gorse in bloom into December.

CONTRIBUTIONS PLEASE.

Ian R-D.

Please remember that if you have any interesting or unusual observations made in connection with the Reserve, then we are always keen to hear about them for possible inclusion into this Newsletter. Details should be sent to the Warden at the address shown in the Newsletter heading. We are also looking for suitable drawings to help brighten up the articles. These drawings should be about 3" x 3" in size, as they will be slightly reduced in our production printing process, and we would like them to be in Indian ink or perhaps black biro, so that they reproduce well, (we have found that pencil is not usually dark enough).

A CLOSER LOOK AT SALTMARSH.

B.Y.

In East Sussex this habitat was common where the sea regularly covered sheltered areas. Now saltmarsh is virtually restricted to the tidal Rother and Cuckmere because of the exclusion of the sea by extensive coastal works. At Rye Harbour the saltmarsh developed behind the shelter of the growing shingle spits, but most is now farmland. However, along the Rother there is a remnant of this habitat which contains a good variety of the plants and animals that are adapted to a regular inundation by the sea.



Sea Purslane

The higher and drier parts of the saltmarsh are dominated by Sea Purslane (as illustrated on the right) with Sea Wormwood and Sea Aster. Lower parts of the marsh that are flooded by every tide may have all five British species of Glasswort and Sea Blite. Around the margins of the marsh are found the Great and Lesser Sea Spurreys and the scarce Sea Heath.

Amongst the roots of these plants can be found a range of unusual animals that are able to tolerate the saltwater, for example 2 weevils live in the roots of Sea Spurrey - *Gronops lunatus* and *Sibinia arenariae*.

Unfortunately the area of saltmarsh along the Rother seems set for a further decline with various proposals for marinas to be built there!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Sunday, 7th February 1988. GUIDED WALK meet at 2.00pm at the Information Centre in the Martello Tower carpark at Rye Harbour for 5 mile walk around the Reserve with the possibility of finding owls at dusk!

Friday, 1st April 1988. WORK PARTY to prepare for the returning breeding birds. Meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre or later at Ternery Pool. Bring lunch, rubber boots, strong working gloves and of course binoculars.

Saturday, 16th April 1988. SPRING WALK meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre, to search for spring flowers and early migrant birds on the Beach Reserve. This walk officially ends at 1.00pm.

Saturday, 7th May 1988. 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. Election of the Committee for the coming year, as well as other entertainments. Further details to be published in the next Newsletter.

Monday, 2nd May 1988. LEASAM HOUSE OPEN DAY. This event is subject to confirmation but will be partly in aid of raising funds for Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, as well as to further develop conservation liaison between organisations in the Rye area. Further details in next Newsletter.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LAPWING.

B.Y.

This familiar bird is common on pasture all year round except during periods of extreme cold that freezes all the grassland invertebrates below the surface and so there is little available food.

As a breeding species at Rye Harbour, this wader has a history of ups and downs which may reflect the effects of severe winters and low breeding success in poor springs. The breeding population has been as high as 80 pairs (1983), but last year there were only 19 pairs, and these produced very few young.

It is a distinctive bird and close observation in the breeding season will reveal a difference between males (as illustrated below), with a distinct facial pattern - black throat, longer crest and broader wings. As opposed to females which have a dirtier face. At other times of the year all of these birds come to resemble the breeding females. Like other plovers, the Lapwing has a very large eye that looks for the movement of its food near the surface.



Lapwing

An alternative name of "Peewit" recalls the call note, whereas it is locally known as the Green Plover. The common name of Lapwing is thought to have arisen from two Anglo-Saxon words, one meaning "to leap" and the other "to reel", which describe the acrobatic, tumbling display flight, that will be a feature of the coming months. Another country name also descriptive of this flight is Flopwing, and yet another sometimes used in Suffolk is Flapjack. In the north of England and Scotland it has been variously known as:- Teafit, Teuchet, Teuchit, Tewet, Tewfit, Tewhit; and in other parts of Britain as:- French Pigeon, Crested Lapwing, Black Plover, Green Lapwing; and perhaps one of the strangest or most inexplicable here in Sussex:- Bullock-a-week (I wonder who can guess how that came about?). This is what makes things complicated when you start asking some local country folk in different parts of Britain "what birds have been seen". Their answers may completely mystify you and of course current bird books do not list these sort of names, perhaps just as well they don't!

Like many ground nesting birds, when the young hatch they can run about usually within about one hour, and at this time the female may lead them away from the exposed nestsite to forage for food. Both adults will strongly defend their family against intruders such as Sheep, Foxes and Crows - while the female may hussle the chicks away to safety or leave them quietly crouching by a grass tussock, the male will fly at the intruder sometimes swooping down to brush his wings along the back of a Sheep.