

Dear Friends,

This is only a short note to introduce the Warden's report. 1978 has certainly been a special year on the Reserve and it is entirely due to Richard's extremely hard work and unbounded enthusiasm; we owe him a great deal.

One or two additional pieces of news have cropped up. We gave £70 towards the electric fencing and other devices used in an attempt to deter predators attacking the Little Terns and are now trying to find an electronic device to set off a scarer when the Little Terns are disturbed at night. Sitting up all night shouting and banging the car door when you can see nothing is not a very rewarding occupation. Electronics experts please step forward! We have just bought a replacement 'fridge for the cottage but are still looking for a small chest of drawers and hanging cupboard. Please let Miss Stewart know if you can make any offers or suggestions.

The Water Authority have given us the timber for the framework of the extension to the hide but we shall have to buy the weatherboarding, roofing, etc. Richard also has plans to deepen the eastern end of the pool to make the islands secure for nesting and an excavator will have to be hired for this. I hope these few notes will show that we are pulling our weight and the funds being usefully employed.

The Information Centre is being well used by the public, and the Winter opening will be 12 noon to 4.0 p.m. on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays until 31st March. It is always good to have someone around, so any volunteers will be very welcome.

Finally, as you all know, Miss Stewart has wanted to retire as Hon. Secretary for a year or two. In addition I have not been at all well all this Summer and may well be forced to resign at the next AGM.

Please come to the next meeting prepared to nominate replacements or preferably send names to Miss Stewart beforehand. I shall miss it, but it's no good going on if one cannot even walk to the hide!

Yours sincerely,

GUY CRITTALL (Chairman)

Dear Friends,

I hope 1978 will go down as a year of real progress in the Reserve's history: not only in the field of education with the opening of the Information Centre, but also of important successes and discoveries which will greatly influence the future management of the Reserve.

During the 1978 nesting season 28 pairs of common terns nested successfully on the new improved islands in the Ternery Pool. A very significant step for the survival of this species in the Rye area.

Ternery Pool in years past had a thriving colony of terns and gulls, but human interference and lack of habitat maintenance during the last twenty years caused the steady decline and the final desertion noted in the early seventies. The dwindling tern colony, moving to the suitable nesting island at North Point Pit across the river, continued to survive but only just. The colony declining from the 90 pairs found there in 1974 to the 25 pairs recorded in 1977. Egg collecting and vandalism being the major factors for the decline.

It has long been thought that if the terns were to survive in the Rye area they must recolonise the now protected islands at Ternery Pool.

Observations at the pool during 1977, however, concluded that the old islands were too low, liable to flooding and at the critical time - early May - were offering insufficient space free from possible flooding for the birds to nest in any numbers other than in exceptionally dry years. One must be able to offer suitable safe conditions however wet the year.

(continued...)

With this in mind and no likelihood of a control over the water levels in the foreseeable future, an alternative plan was put into operation during the winter of 1977/8 to alter quite drastically the character of the islands.

Considerable manual labour was called for and blisters, bruises and duckings were given willingly! The work is expected to continue for a further two or three years and we're always on the look-out for more help - if you are able, please let me know. The next full-scale work party, incidentally, will be next Easter weekend. Come along and see or help on any of the four days of the holiday: meet at the Information Centre at 10.00 or at Ternery Pool from 10.15. Many hands make very light work.

Now for the bad news. Some heart-breaking discoveries were made during the 1977 and 1978 seasons concerning the open shingle areas of the Reserve and the birds that nest there.

Observations during 1977 revealed a serious predation problem affecting all ground nesting birds. This year during our 24-hour protection programme particular emphasis was put on the detection and observation of nocturnal predators. The results were horrifying.

Among the species observed were: little owl, feral cat, and badger, but these appeared to be of little significance. Another species, and a particularly terrifying one if you happen to be a little tern or a ringed plover with young chicks or eggs, was found to be particularly common. This was the fox. Three or four, possibly more, were systematically quartering the shingle every night in search of prey. The result was devastating.

Fortunately these foxes were not keen to swim and consequently the island nesting birds were left unharmed. All other ground nesters, however, i.e. little tern, ringed plover, oystercatcher, redshank, lapwing and skylark, experienced considerable losses. In a single night seven little tern chicks and four clutches of eggs were taken by a single fox. This year's 14 pairs of little terns persisting only to rear three chicks to the flying stage. The poor success is due entirely to fox predation.

The recognition of this problem is a positive advancement - first identify your enemy. The next consideration is how - and indeed if - we should influence the so-called natural balance in favour of the weaker. Not forgetting that man is already a major influencing factor.

I know what I propose to do. What would you do? I am interested to know your feelings, write and let me know. Leave things alone to look after themselves, you may say. Should we? Or should we step in and help the birds?

Yours sincerely,

RICHARD KNIGHT

Warden.