



# NEWSLETTER

## The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

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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.

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.

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### WARDEN'S REPORT.

Dr. Barry Yates.

Not too many years ago the beach between Rye Harbour and Fairlight was a very remote place. There was extensive marshland and only a few local people ventured out to the shore to exploit a very rich and productive fishery and there were very few potential predators of the ground nesting birds in the immediate area. Under these conditions the nesting sea and shore birds thrived and local people tell of great colonies of terns that they called 'kips' along the beach, and how they collected the eggs without doing any harm to the numbers. Rye Harbour was also the last regular nesting site of the Kentish Plover in Britain.

Today the situation is very different. The marshland has been intensively drained to increase the productivity of the agriculture which has also allowed many predators to live here all year round. The fish stocks of Rye Bay have been depleted by overfishing and possibly a decline in water quality. In addition there are several million people living within a few hours travelling distance.

The pressure on the wildlife had increased so much in several respects, that by the 1960's the area's wildlife was at risk of being impoverished. The numbers of nesting birds was very low and they were not breeding successfully. If the Rye Harbour Local Nature Reserve had not been established in 1970, I have no doubt that the Little and Common Terns would no longer breed here and other ground nesting birds such as Redshank, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher and Wheatear would nest in very much smaller numbers. Now the area is of National or Regional importance for many species of plants and animals.

In protecting and encouraging the rarer species to survive here, we are continually reminded of how vulnerable they are and just how cruel and tough nature can be. Harassed by predators and hindered by weather, the breeding birds generally have not had a very successful year so far. First the good news; Common Terns have increased their numbers to about 85 pairs and they have had tremendous success raising more than 150 young; the Yellow Wagtails have maintained their population at about 45 pairs and raised a lot of young; Wheatears have maintained numbers at around 11 pairs with several pairs known to have raised second broods. Great Crested Grebes have had a good year with 5 pairs in the SSSI raising 7 young.

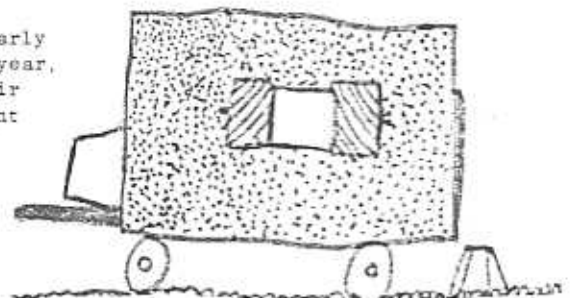
Now for the bad news; during the early part of the nesting season few nests survived the attentions of the Foxes, Crows and other predators, some of which managed to defeat the electric fences (perhaps because of the very dry weather of May and June providing very poor electrical earthing). As midsummer approached, losses declined and the ground nesting birds were more successful in hatching young. It was during this time that the 45 pairs of Ringed Plover raised more young, but it came too late for such early nesting species as Lapwing and Redshank. The Little Tern numbers were about the same as last year's 55 pairs, but success was much lower. Most chicks hatched in time for the poor July weather when the adults were having difficulty feeding in the rough sea, so that chicks were kept hungry, and they did not hide as they normally should when danger approached. Therefore many provided an easy meal for a persistent Kestrel. As I write, only 4 Little Tern chicks have been raised to flying and we can only expect a maximum of about a dozen to do so.



KESTREL  
STEVE DUFFY

The Sandwich Terns returned during April in good numbers and during early May 350 settled in just the position that they used for nesting last year, then they suddenly all deserted the area, presumably returning to their former site at Dungeness. However, during July many young were brought over at an early age to add their raucous cries to the intense activity at Ternery Pool.

The Mallard and Tufted Ducks of the whole area have produced very few young and the Little Grebes at Ternery Pool have done very poorly as well, which made me very suspicious of Mink, but none



(The drawing on the right is by David Yates, aged 7, showing the Tern Watch caravan.)

were seen and Moorhens and Coots did well. Perhaps it was the large number of Coots that adversely affected the other water birds? The balance of nature is very delicate and it is often the scarce species that are vulnerable, so how much should we interfere and to what lengths should we go to increase the numbers of the rare species?

In addition to the nesting birds, the Reserve has had a good variety of more unusual species of visitors to watch. In May there were 2 Spoonbills for a week at Ternery Pool, a Little Egret for at least 3 days, a Black Kite on 2 occasions and a Whiskered Tern for 2 days, and an albino Common Gull all summer. Now, in late July, Ternery Pool has a couple of Roseate Terns and a Black-necked Grebe in breeding plumage and we are awaiting the return of the waders that breed in the far north.

As the Reserve becomes more popular with visitors, the pressure on seats in the hides increases, especially in the popular Crittall Hide at weekends. To increase the capacity of this hide we are proposing to extend it before the end of the year and provide extra seating at the rear.

*(The illustration on the right by Bob Greenhalf, shows part of the picture on the shopping board which is one of our sales items that is available at £3.50 from the Warden or at our public events.)*



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CRAFT BAZAAR.

Please come and join us at our Craft Bazaar on 29th August (Bank Holiday Monday) at Winchelsea Beach Village Hall, from 10.30am until 2.00pm.

Stalls will include: Cakes and preserves, knitwear, sewing, soft toys, pottery, children's clothes, artwork, good-as-new, tombola, ice-creams, wiggly wire, roll-a-coin and Nature Reserve sales goods.

We are still looking for some items for sale, with a percentage to go to the Reserve funds. For further details and offers of help, please contact Anne Yates at Rye 223862. Thank you.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

- Monday, 29th August: CRAFT BAZAAR as detailed above.
- Saturday, 10th September: LATE SUMMER MIGRANTS, five mile circular walk to look for late summer migrants around the Reserve. Meet at the Information Centre in the Martello Tower carpark at 9.00am, bring lunch for about 12.30pm in the Wood. Returning about 2.00pm.
- Sunday, 18th September: WORK PARTY in conjunction with the Sussex Ornithological Society, to carry out essential management at Ternery Pool. Meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre. Bring lunch as well as gardening gloves, forks, rakes, rubber boots and binoculars. Raft trips to the islands organised in return for a few hours hard weeding!
- Sunday, 27th November: SEABIRD WATCH, meet at the Information Centre at 1.00pm for a walk to Ternery Pool and the shoreline, returning after dusk. Bring binoculars and telescopes.

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ANNUAL REPORT & PLANT LIST.

The Annual Report of the Reserve's wildlife activities during 1987 has now been printed and is available. It contains detailed information about the running of the Reserve, its history and its funding. There is a detailed account of the year's weather, birds, other vertebrates, bumblebees and woodlice, together with a summary of the invertebrate records. There are 36 line drawings by six different artists.

If you would like a copy, then please send £1 plus a stamped (24p) self addressed envelope (at least 6" x 9" in size) to the Warden at the address shown in the heading of this Newsletter.

Copies of the 1986 Annual Report are still available, containing a complete list of our flowering plants. Same cost as above, but if you would like an up-to-date (1988) Plant List this is available for 50p plus s.a.e.

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CONTRIBUTIONS PLEASE.

Over the last two years the Warden has written several short illustrated articles which have taken a close look at a small group of animals or plants. These have added variety and interest to our Newsletters, and hopefully provided an insight to some of the more common and easily seen species of the Reserve. If you feel that you could write a concise account with a small line drawing, preferably in Indian ink or black biro, then please send it to the Warden for possible inclusion in future editions of the Newsletter. We are sure that by obtaining contributions from a variety of different people, this will enhance future editions, as well as instruct some of our newer readers in some of our other forms of wildlife on the Reserve. Do please have a go, even if you are not able to illustrate your article, we would still be keen to have your comments.

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\*\*\*\*\* THE END \*\*\*\*\*