



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 (number 269535) 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.

SECRETARY: Miss Liz Blackwell.

TREASURER: David Marshall.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Peter Philpot.

COMMITTEE: Steve Denny, Bob Greenhalf, Peter Greenhalf, Frank Palmer,
Mrs. Anne Yates, Dr. Barry Yates (Warden).

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WARDEN'S REPORT.

Dr. Barry Yates.

This years spring and summer weather has been exceptionally dry and hot. For example, rainfall in May and June only totalled 60mm (whereas the 12 year average is 109mm) and the maximum temperature for May averaged 5°C higher than average. This fine weather did benefit some of the Reserves wildlife, like the butterflies, but some species found it all too much. Many plants not really adapted to arid areas have wilted and died, but even those typical of the shingle, such as Yellow Horned Poppy have finished flowering already.

For the most important breeding birds, the terns, it has been the worst year since 1972 ! In that year no Little or Common Terns raised young successfully. This year looks as if it will be the same, despite the efforts of myself, a summer assistant, many volunteer Tern Watchers and of course the miles and miles of electrified wire. There are two likely reasons for this - Firstly, there was a very great number of Foxes this year and the fence did not stop all of them! We are probably running too much wire off one fence power unit for such an unusual situation. Added to this, the dry weather reduced the water level in Ternery Pool, so that the islands did not offer a safe nesting place for Common Terns as it usually does.

Secondly, from early May it was clear to me that the terns were possibly having some difficulty in finding enough suitable fish and consequently the number of nesting Little Terns only reached about 30 pairs, which is roughly half the normal number. After some early losses due to Fox predation, there was a reluctance to re-nest, with only 15 Little and 30 Common Terns doing so. They just did not seem to have their usual enthusiasm. In fact no Little Terns hatched at all, and although a few Common Terns managed to hatch, these soon disappeared after a few days..... a real disaster!



*Sandwich
Terns
in their
summer
plumage*

A significant improvement in the effectiveness of the electric fence should be comparatively easy to accomplish if we use an extra power unit. However, if this years problem is due to lack of suitable food for the terns to catch out in Rye Bay, then this will pose a serious cause for concern.

Other species such as Ringed Plover also suffered badly from the foxes, but they were able to re-nest many times to raise a few young. Some species, such as Redshank and Shelduck overcame the predator problems on the Reserve and managed to raise large numbers of young; Redshank = 15+ Shelduck = 80+ (a record number for the Reserve).

At Ternery Pool many waterbirds attempted to nest, including Canada Geese, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Moorhen, Coot, Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, and possibly Teal and Pochard. Not all were successful, but it provided a greater variety than usual for visiting birdwatchers during the summer months. Other successes this year have been the large numbers of nesting Sedge Warblers (5 times the normal numbers of recent years), Yellow Wagtails and Turtle Doves.

The Wader Pool has attracted its usual variety of passing birds, like breeding plumaged Spotted Redshank and Ruff, but this year it was also home to 4 pairs of Redshank and a pair of Lapwings. The visiting birds included spring Curlew Sandpipers, Little and Temminck's Stints among other more common waders, but perhaps most unusual of all was the blue Budgerigar which stayed for three weeks in June and July. With the hot dry weather plus the "budgy" flitting about and feeding in the grass seed heads, it seemed more like an "Australian Summer".

(Our thanks to Bob Greenhalf for all the illustrations in this issue).

WATCH OUT - THERE ARE MIGRANTS ABOUT.

Barry Yates.

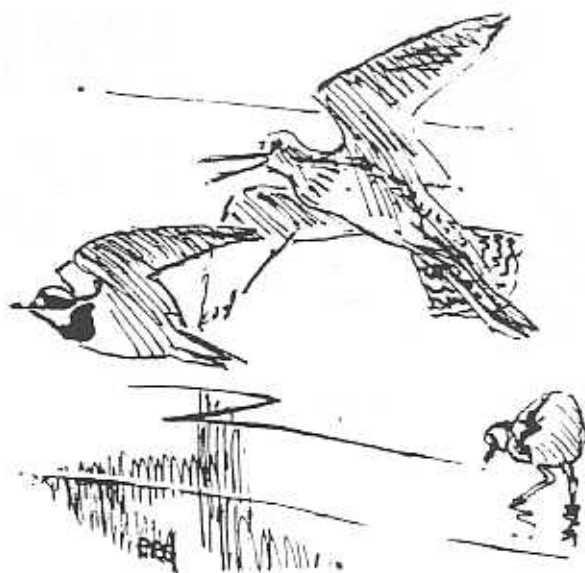
As we approach the autumn migration season the start of the wader passage has already begun, with good numbers of Ruff (and Reeves), Black-tailed Godwits, Greenshanks and many smaller brown waders. As I write (in the third week of July), there have been at least 18 species of wader at Ternery Pool! It is a time of variety, but also a tricky one for identifying those all too similar species. At the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve this variety and close views are generally good enough, but for further practise why not try some watching at the nearby Pett Level Pools.

Spotted Redshank in summer plumage



This year it has been drained again by the Sussex Ornithological Society (with financial help from several local natural history societies) to help attract feeding waders, en route to their winter quarters further south. Like our Reserve, there is usually someone around at Pett Level to help you to identify those species that "look like nothing in the book"!

Another bonus at Pett Level is the fact that you do not even have to get out of your car to see the birds around the Pool, because the road is right up against the shoreline, so that you can watch in comfort, especially when the weather is wet or windy. It is a place well worth a look at this time of year, especially as the SOS do not necessarily drain the Pool every year. In the early spring it is a good place to hear and see the Marsh Frogs.



Redshank chasing a Ringed Plover

ASSISTANT WARDEN.

This year the Reserve has had the extra support of Assistant Warden, Sheena Ridley, who in addition to general patrolling duties has added considerably to our records of flowering plants and mammals. This new post has been funded jointly by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Friends. It has enabled the Warden to carry out other studies around the SSSI and even to have the "occasional" day off!



*Shelduck family
and a Common
Tern*

ANNUAL REPORT.

The 1988 Annual Report of the Nature Reserve was printed in May this year. As well as the usual information about the Reserve and a detailed account of the year's birds, it contains articles about Butterflies and the Martello Towers or Pitt's Pots. Copies are available at £1 each plus 25p post and packing, from the Warden.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

- Monday, 28th August 1989 PLANT & PRODUCE SALE at the Winchelsea Beach Village Hall Sea Road, Winchelsea Beach, from 10.00am. If you can help to provide any items which we can sell to raise funds for the Reserve at this event, then please contact Barry Yates or bring them along on the day. Thank you.
- Saturday, 2nd September 1989 BAT WATCH. Meet at 7.00pm at the Information Centre at Rye Harbour Martello Tower carpark. Batman, Mike Gordon, will lead us to track down some of the local species with his bat detector.
- Sunday, 17th September 1989 SIX MILE GUIDED WALK for 75 species of birds ?????? Meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre in the Rye Harbour Martello Tower carpark. Bring lunch for a picnic in the Wood on the Reserve. High tide = 1.00pm Return to carpark at about 3.00pm.
- Saturday, 23rd September 1989 WORK PARTY. Meet at 10.00am at the Information Centre or later at Ternery Pool. Bring lunch, as well as long-handled garden fork or rake, work gloves and binoculars (just in case a rare bird pops up). This will be a special Work Party to clear some of the weeds on the islands and around the edges of Ternery Pool. Finish about 3.00pm.
- Sunday, 12th November 1989 MORNING WALK TO TERNERY POOL. Guided walk starts at 9.00am from the Information Centre at Rye Harbour Martello Tower carpark. High tide = 9.30am. Return to carpark at about 12.30pm.

FIND A SPECIES SERVICE.

Barry Yates.

Many people seem to have a particular species that they would like to see, but they often hear about one visible locally just too late. It is usually a bird, but may be other animals or plants in flower.

To help you AND TO HELP RAISE MONEY FOR THE RESERVE'S LAND FUND, I will run the following scheme. You provide me with a list of the species that you would like to see, together with £1 for each species, and I will contact you when there is a good (but never certain !) chance of seeing it, with all the necessary details.

The £1 will be added to our LAND FUND and may one day help to purchase a few square metres of land that can then be managed for its wildlife for the future.

Please help us to help you get the most out of your wildlife watching. By getting the right information at the right time, you will stand a really good chance of seeing your chosen species.

BINOCULARS FOR SALE.

Swift SPWA	9 x 42	= £100
Bushnell Explorer	10 x 50	= £100

Both pairs are boxed and in mint condition and are ideal for birdwatching.

For further details and purchase contact the Warden (see address in Newsletter heading)

SQUEAKER

Barry Yates.

For at least seven years there has been a stranger amongst our Little Terns. He looks just like an ordinary Little Tern, but with the exception of a grey rump that can easily be missed. He was first noticed in 1983 when Richard and Pam Knight were the Wardens to the Reserve, and the bird made itself particularly distinctive by its high pitched "squeaky" voice, somewhat resembling the piping call of an Oystercatcher. This call is only made when displaying to a female, usually over an established colony. He has occurred here each summer since 1983, although considerable patience was often needed in order to hear him. A couple of years ago this call was compared to that of the American species of Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*), which had never before occurred this side of the Atlantic. Last year I managed to make a decent sound recording of Squeaker and this recording has been compared with the Least Tern on a sound spectrogram. To me Squeaker is a Least Tern and last year I submitted the description to the Rarities Committee..... the result of their deliberations may take some considerable time. This year, we were going to release this information to the press and to the "twitchers", but unusually the bird was only heard on 4 occasions and it never became a reliable sighting (or sounding). It, like the Little Terns, also seemed to lack enthusiasm !

DISTINCTIVE WRITING PAPER.

We have just launched a new sales product to help raise funds for the Reserve. Packs of 10 sheets of quality Laid Paper and 10 envelopes printed in matching design, packed in an attractive wallet.

The artwork is by our well-known local wildlife artist, Bob Greenhalf, shown in part at the bottom left of this page, depicting two of our most famous species to be seen on the Reserve during the summer months - the Yellow Horned Poppy and the Little Tern sitting on the shingle.

These packs are available from the Warden at £1.50 plus 25p post and packing each.

Please send them to your friends to help our Friends. Thank you.

***** END *****

