



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 management of the Nature Reserve within the Rye Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest (known as the SSSI).

CHAIRMAN: Ian Rumley-Dawson

SECRETARY: Liz Blackwell

TREASURER: David Marshall

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Peter Philpot

COMMITTEE: Steve Denny, Bob Greenhalf, Peter Greenhalf, Frank Palmer, Anne Yates.

WARDEN: Dr. Barry Yates.

WINTER 1989/90

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 34.

WARDEN'S REPORT - for the Period August to mid-December 1989.

The long, fine dry summer, turned into a fine, settled autumn and while Ternery Pool remained very low we had to wait until mid-December for the first real rainfall for a long, long, time.

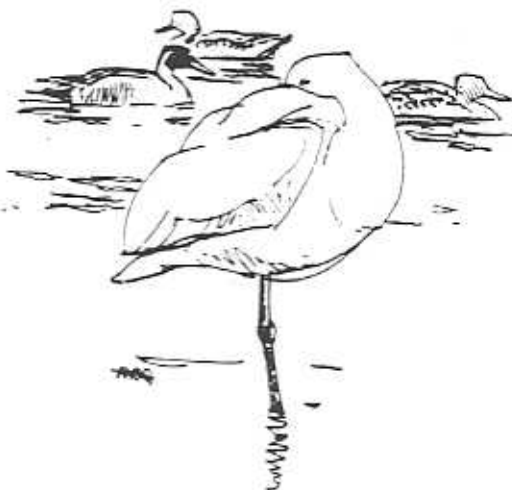
There have been (and still are) excellent numbers of dabbling ducks at Ternery Pool WIGEON 50, GADWALL 20, TEAL 400, MALLARD 450, PINTAIL 17, GARGANEY 5, SHOVELER 130, RED-CRESTED POCHARD 1, but diving ducks, such as POCHARD & TUFTED DUCK have been scarce (probably because of very low water levels) although a SCAUP was present for 5 days in October.

Offshore GANNETS reached 30 in October, FULMARS 50

in December with a sprinkling of COMMON SCOTERS, EIDERS AND GUILLEMOTS, but the sea usually becomes more rewarding in February with large numbers of DIVERS & GREBES.

The long summer proved excellent for large white birds; LITTLE EGRETS (previously only 2 birds recorded since 1970) were regular from 2nd August until 15th September involving 2-3 birds. Several different SPOONBILLS turned up, with the longest staying being a first year from 5th October until at least 9th December, commuting between the

spoonbill and pintails



little egrets

river, Northpoint Pit and Ternery Pool. This bird was very distinctive because on each leg was a large coloured ring carrying a large number so we should find out where it came from. The fine summer meant many shingle plants had a successful production of seed and this attracted large flocks of GOLDFINCHES, LINNETS and, especially, GREENFINCHES, which in turn attracted several birds of prey. HOBBIES remained regular until the end of September when MERLINS took over as the ones to look out for, with 1-2 seen daily. There have also been two sightings of a PEREGRINE. HEN HARRIERS remained scarce, but a superb silver male was seen from Watch Cottage in mid-December. It is sad to report the loss of a species from the long list of species seen, however, it is not too sad because it is one that was introduced into the

area in the first place. The RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE, which has been steadily declining over the last four years - so all of your PARTRIDGE sightings should be GREY. Around Ternery Pool WATER RAILS have been regular since August, but how many is anyone's guess, mine is about 10!!

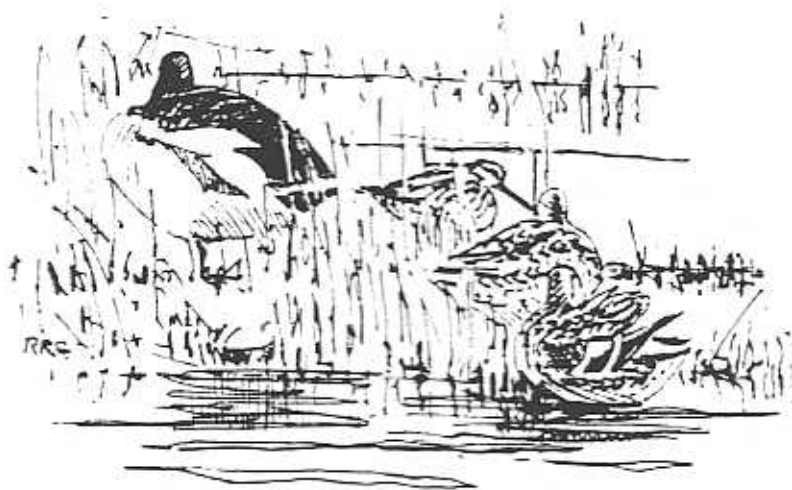
One of the most popular birds with visitors all year round is that distinctive and noisy wader, the OYSTERCATCHER and it is doing well here, recently 538 were counted on the islands of Ternery Pool, all trying to shelter from a gale force wind at high tide. There was the usual variety of less common waders, but the star wader of the autumn was a BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER at Ternery Pool on 14th October (the only other reserve record was in 1973 and there are only 7 county records). It was only present for a few hours, but many local supporters of the reserve managed to see it.

One bird of the shore that has been very scarce in recent years is the SNOW BUNTING, but this year there has been a good sprinkling since September. A flock of six was seen during the last FRIENDS Guided Walk on November 12th, as was the last WHEATEAR of the season and a late COMMON SANDPIPER.

It is also sad to report that litter is an increasing problem along the shore. It is not all dropped by visitors - much is blown in off the sea. In recent years we have been greatly helped by the local GREENPEACE group, but I think the Friends could help, so in the diary dates I have included 3 Saturday afternoons.

The Reserve is always an exciting place to visit, whatever the time of year. One of its important aspects is the BREEDING BIRDS, but in recent years there has been poor breeding success among several species because of losses to foxes. During this winter we are making some major improvements that should make the fencing more effective and give the ground nesting species a better chance of success.

I hope you are all able to visit and enjoy the Reserve during 1990 and I look forward to your continued support. Thank-you.



mallard, snipe and teal

SHALLOW POOLS I & II - by BJY

I. The development of the small water pool in 1985 has demonstrated the tremendous value of such scarce habitat to wildlife and it provides a focus for birdwatching. The time has now come to try and enlarge the water pool and the various Reserve Committees have agreed a proposal to quadruple the area of the pool and thus provide a larger feature in front of the Colin Green Hide. The proposal will change the character of the pool, because it will be fed with saline water from the river, but we feel it is the only means of improving the pool for the watchers and the watched.

I hope this project will be started before the spring.

II. In front of Watch Cottages there is an extensive area of low lying land, a small part of which has been flooded recently by the owner. There is occasional wildfowling at this pool, but there should be an overall gain to the wildlife because its creation. It has already proved of great value to wading birds and some ducks, but its value should increase as the natural food builds up. Already it has added TEMMINCK'S STINT, AVOCET and LITTLE RINGED PLOVER to the list of species seen from Watch Cottage and it should prove valuable for nesting species.

The 3 acres of pool can be viewed from the public footpath, but please do not venture across the field, it is private and you would only disturb the pools.

TREE SPARROW NESTBOXES - by BJY

In Sussex this species is declining and even absent from many areas. In winter at Rye Harbour there is the largest County flock (up to 75), and in summer a few stay to breed. There is a great shortage of suitable nest sites, so last year I put up a few boxes which were used by some for roosting and I hope they will nest this year.

If you would like to help with this project you could supply a nestbox and I will let you know of its success. Suitable boxes are of the classic Blue Tit design, but with a slightly larger hole of 28mm.



*wheatears nest in
special boxes
on the ground*

SUSSEX BIRD REPORT - by BJY

Each year the SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY produces a detailed REPORT of the county's birds, plus several studies of individual species. Reading such an account it becomes clear how important the Reserve is for many species.

For a copy of the 1988 REPORT send £3.00 plus a 6"x9" S.A.E. to;

J. Trowell, Membership Secretary, Lorrimer (RH), Main Road,
Icklesham, Winchelsea, East Sussex. TN36 4BS.

TERN WATCH 1990 - by BJY

The regular voluntary wardening scheme from mid-May until August will again be organised by Peter Philpot. A TERN WATCHER spends periods of 3 or 4 hours dealing with visitors at the caravan overlooking the Little Tern colony. If you would like to participate please let him know at the evening for Tern Watchers (see below), or, if you cannot attend, please telephone him (Rye 225998).

TERN WATCHER'S EVENING - Saturday, 31st March. 7.30pm at Winchelsea Beach Village Hall. Just for those people who helped with last years wardening of the Reserve and those wanting to participate this year.

LEFT RED UX - by BJY

This is not some sort of secret code, but the identity of an individual CORMORANT that is marked with a large red ring on its left leg inscribed in white with the letters UX. It is one of 6 colour ringed Cormorants identified at Rye Harbour in the last five years. All were ringed in the nest and come from Solway Firth, Dyfed, or Ireland. Left red UX has the longest recorded history;

In 1985 it was ringed as a chick at St. Margarets Island, Tenby, Dyfed on 23rd June, it was then subsequently identified at Rye Harbour on 10th November and again in December. In 1986 it was still at Rye Harbour in May & June, then in 1987 it was noted in February, March & July. In 1988 it was recorded as breeding near its birthplace in mid-June, but it was back with us in September. This year the only sighting was from Watch Cottage on 16th December.

The large colour rings do look unnatural, but they are a powerful research tool for those trying to discover more about large birds.

NEW SALES ITEM - Notelets - by BJY

The packs of distinctive writing paper described in the last Newsletter have been our most successful item and we now have further stocks. We have tried to obtain the packs in Recycled Paper, but without success - so far.... However, we have found a similar item that is produced on 100% RECYCLED PAPER - a pack of ten cream Notelets printed in brown with a copy of the Tea-Towel design (see right) by Bob Greenhalf. This shows clearly many aspects of the Rye Harbour beach in summer; Common & Little Terns, Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers, Wheatears, Yellow Horned Poppy, Sea Pea and Biting Stonecrop.

Each pack of Notelets or Writing Paper costs £1.50p + 25p p&p from the Warden.

As a reminder the Tea Towel is handprinted in brown on 100% white cotton and costs £2.20p + 25p p&p from the Warden.

*the notelet and
tea-towel design*



FIND A SPECIES SERVICE - by BJY

Just a reminder that if there is a species (bird or plant) that you would like to see I can (at a cost of £1 for each species - all proceeds to the Land Fund) let you know when there is a good chance of seeing it.

Alternatively the reserve's most interesting birds feature daily on the BIRDLINE SOUTH EAST service.

Telephone 0898 700240 - but this costs 25p/38p per minute !!!

BLUE BOULDERS OF RYE HARBOUR - by Michael Alford

If you have ever walked along the shoreline of the Nature Reserve at low tide it is probable that you have noticed the blue flints, or boulders of around 2-3 inches in length that line the foreshore.

Although now a half forgotten memory, these blue flints once provided a modest living to those who collected them. They were of prime importance in the manufacture of high grade pottery as an ingredient which I believe added to both the strength and beauty of the finished product.

In their time hundreds of tons of these flints were shipped to the Stoke-on-Trent area, either by sea to Runcorn or Selby, where they were transferred into narrow boats, or else they were conveyed by rail from near the William the Conqueror public house at Rye Harbour.

The flints, once at Stoke-on-Trent, were mixed with coal and heated in hoppers. This made the flints very brittle, enabling them to be ground into powder, which was then added to the other ingredients in the manufacture of pottery.

Until the 1930's the flints were collected from the foreshore by specially adapted "boulder boats" capable of carrying a load of two or three tons. There is a good example of a Rye Harbour boulder boat, the "Sarah Elgar", taken in 1910, in John Collard's - A Maritime History of Rye. I have an account book dating from 1913 to the early 1920's when the price paid per ton was 9/- (45p). Each boulderer was licensed to pick up to a maximum of 200 tons per annum and of which he paid a royalty of 6d (2½p) per ton.

The trade petered out in the early 1950's purely for economic reasons, but in some places on the shore it is still possible to see some of the sorted piles of the "blue boulders" that were not collected.

(A longer account of the Blue Boulders will be in the 1989 Annual Report).

Between the River Mouth and Ternery Pool, inside the fencing, the piles of boulders will be marked by blue posts.

THE ELUSIVE THOUSAND - by Peter Philpot

An alternative for the heading could be two forwards and one back. No its neither the steps for a square dance, or an ambitious twitcher's target,

its THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE FRIENDS !

In May 1985, when I was persuaded to take on the membership secretary's role we had 579 members, but 106 of those had not renewed by June, so how many FRIENDS did we have ? It looks like 473. In 1985 it was our ambition to have 1000 members and in April 1988 we at last achieved 1004, but, before I celebrated, I checked the cards (not Tarot but Membership) and found that 76 had lapsed, so back to 928.

In April this year, surely we must have made it with a total of 1074, but again after removing the 81 offending cards only 993 - so close, yet not quite there.

And what of this year ? Well, if you have not yet paid your subscription for 1989, this Newsletter will have a reminder with it. I have been through the cards once again (the membership should be 1161 - surely enough ?) and found 189 that have not yet renewed, taking us back to 972 !!! I am sure that many of the 189 will renew and perhap this year we shall lay the ghost of 1000.

PLEASE RENEW NOW
BEFORE YOU FORGET

Thank-you

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY - 1990

Litter Collection along shore.

3rd February - Saturday - 2pm.

3rd March - Saturday - 2pm.

1st April - Saturday - 2pm.

For all of the above meet at the Information Centre for an afternoon of clearing the beach of rubbish and probably some good birdwatching - work gloves advisable.

Work Party with the Sussex Ornithological Society

24th March - Saturday - 10am. Weeding and other tasks around Ternery Pool.

Meet at Information Centre with boots, gloves, large garden forks and lunch.

Guided Walks

24th February - Saturday - 9am-midday. 2 mile walk, birds.

29th April - Sunday - 5pm-dusk(8.30ish). 2 mile walk, birds especially roosting waders.

27th May - Sunday - 9am-3pm. 6 mile walk, birds and flowers.

Meet at Information Centre for the start of all Guided Walks

Plant Recording

7th April - Saturday - a practical introduction to the study of flowering plants within the SSSI - please contact the warden for further details and booking. Limited numbers.

Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

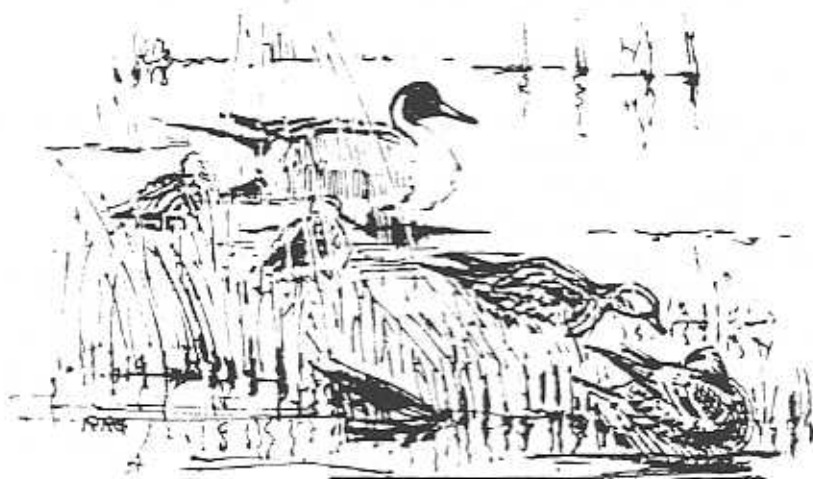
28th April - Saturday - 7.30pm. In the Winchelsea Beach Village Hall, Sea Road,
Winchelsea Beach, East Sussex.

The AGM will be followed by an illustrated talk - full details in the next Newsletter.

TIDE TABLES - by BJY

The state of the tide is always an important consideration when birdwatching on the Reserve.

If you would like a 1990 Rye Harbour Tide Table please send me a S.A.E. plus 42p.



pintail, snipe and teal

All illustrations in this Newsletter are by Bob Greenhalf.