



# The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

A registered charity (No 269535) founded in 1973 to aid in the establishment and management of the Nature Reserve within the Rye Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

**Chairman** Nicky Frith                      **Vice Chair** Frank Palmer  
**Secretary** Liz Blackwell                  **Treasurer** Frank Clarke  
**Membership Secretary** Anita Gibbs  
**Committee** Steve Denny, Bob Greenhalf, Peter Philpot, Peter Lloyd, Bill Marshall

**Reserve Manager** Dr. Barry Yates                      **Assistant Warden** Dominic Funnell

**Nature Reserve Address**  
 2, Watch Cottages, Nook Beach, Winchelsea, East Sussex, TN36 4LU  
 Tel: 01797 223862

Winter 1996 Newsletter

No. 55

## 317 new species recorded

The Spring 1996 Newsletter showed a total of 2,506 species recorded from the Nature Reserve - these are listed in the Wildlife Inventory available for £2 plus an A5 sae from the Nature Reserve address. During the year we have been busy recording the wildlife and discovered another 314 species. The status of these species is shown here.

Among the more interesting new species were:

*Pteromica pectorosa* A rare snail killing fly found near temporary pools and in swampy areas. Each larva requires 2-3 snails to complete development. Found at Castle Water in June.

*Andrena gravida* Banded Mining Bee. A very rare species last recorded in Britain in 1961, the headquarters of this species has

always been Kent, though it has also been noted in Essex and Sussex. The typical habitat in Britain is not known. Flower visits include willow, mallows and dandelions. One seen at Castle Water in June.

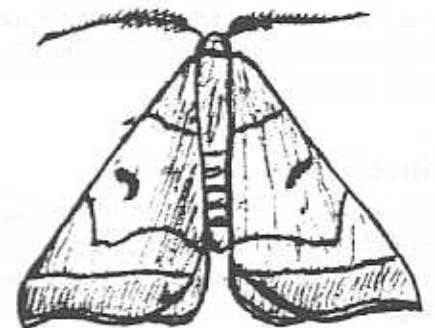
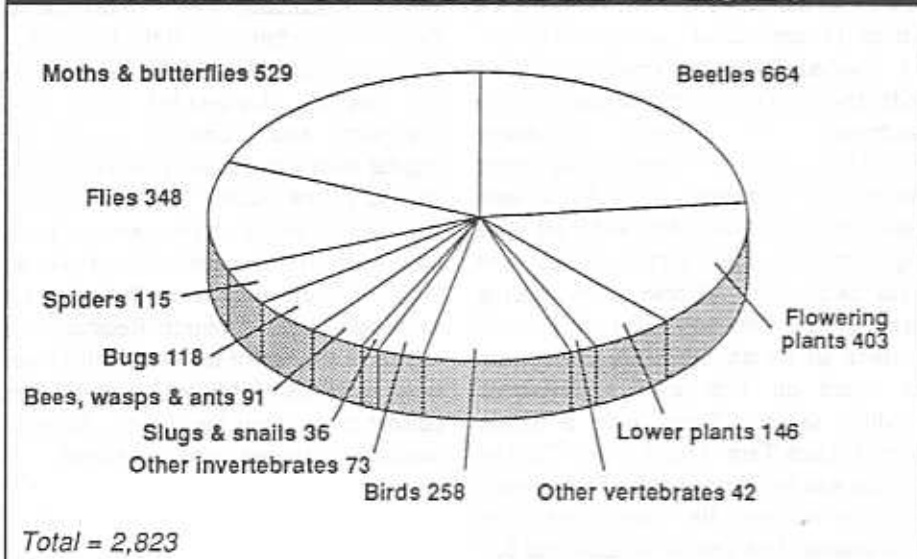
*Philanthus triangulum* Bee Wolf. A rare yellow and black digger wasp found in lowland heath, coastal sand dunes and cliffs where it excavates nest burrows in sandy soil. The nest is provisioned with paralysed bees, mostly honeybees. Recorded at Castle Water in July and

September.

*Acronicta strigosa* Marsh Dagger A moth not recorded in Britain since 1933. It was known locally in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, noted rarely elsewhere. Also scattered colonies in Severn Valley near Gloucester and Tewksbury until 1905; there are early records from Norfolk. It breeds on mature hawthorn woodland and hedgerows, preferring damp situations. One was caught at the light trap at Watch Cottage in July.

	Common	Local	Notable	Endangered	Total
1995	1860	410	193	43	<u>2506</u>
1996	2058	498	215	52	<u>2823</u>

### NUMBER OF RECORDED SPECIES



Plumed Fan Foot

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# Wildlife Report

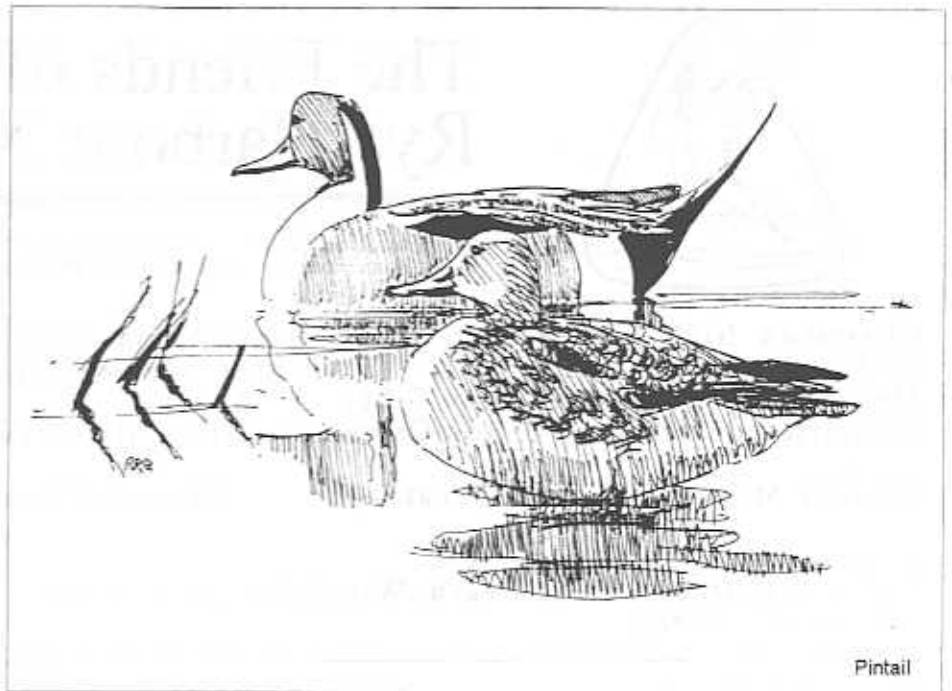
## July

Highlights for the month included a creche of three female Gadwall with at least 22 ducklings; an immature male Eider (all month); a Quail calling in front of Watch Cottage (16th); single Little Ringed Plovers at Ternery Pool (from 14th); male Kentish Plover at the Wader Pool (24th); up to 2 Little Stints at Ternery Pool (from 24th); 3 summer plumage Curlew Sandpipers (29th); Ruff on 5 dates including 4 on 17th; up to 14 Black-tailed Godwits occasionally at Ternery Pool (all month); up to 5 Green Sandpipers at Castle Water and several Common Sandpipers on all pits (all month); 2 Roseate Terns, including a colour ringed bird, at Ternery Pool (12th) and a Bee-eater flew over Harbour Farm (17th). A superb month for moths with light traps catching a total of 290 species, including 17 new for the area. Our rare residents had a very good year. *Cynaedra dentalis* recorded on 7 dates with a maximum of 18 on 25th; *Ethmia bipunctella* recorded on 13 dates with a peak of 6 on 28th; Pale Grass Eggar (*Lasiocampa trifolii flava*) 1 on 25th; Pygmy Footman (*Eilema pygmaeola pallifrons*) caught on 10 dates; Sand Dart (*Agrostis ripae*) recorded on 6 dates with 2 on 25th; Oblique Striped (*Philalapteryx virgata*) 1 on 30th; Dotted Fan Foot (*Macrochilo cribumalis* a scarce moth in Sussex) was unrecorded at Rye Harbour until this year when a strong colony was found, with specimens being seen at 3 different sites on several dates from 21st.

The other main area of interest was the scarce migrants recorded; Scarce Bordered Straw (*Heliothis armigera*) singles on 1st, 5th and 11th; Bright Wave (*Idaea ochrata cantiata*) single on 25th, possibly the first County record; Scarce Black Arches (*Nola aerugula*) single on 28th, recorded for the third consecutive year. This is just the fifth county record.

## Rare moth

The entomological highlight of the year occurred on the night of 22nd when a Marsh Dagger (*Acronicta strigosa*) was caught, the first UK record since 1933. From another trap a very worn moth has been sent to the Natural History Museum to be correctly identified, it is probably Plumed Fan Foot (*Herminia plumigeralis*), with only one other record in Britain (see illustration on page 1).



## August

Offshore there were up to 20 Gannets (from 13th), an occasional Fulmar, but no Common Scoter. There was a Little Egret (17th & 18th), 2 Spoonbills (20th) and 2 Chilean Flamingos (29th). Among the more common Shoveler, Gadwall and Teal were: 1-4 Wigeon (from 17th), 3 Pintail (28th), a Garganey (22nd & 26th), an Eider (all month) and a Water Rail (from 10th). Raptors included regular Hobby, a Marsh Harrier (on 4 dates from 11th), Montagu's Harrier (16th), Merlin (30th) and Peregrine (14th, 16th & 24th). Wading birds included up to 260 Oystercatcher, 1-5 Little Ringed Plover, up to 7 Golden Plover (from 5th), a summer plumage Grey Plover (from 30th), up to 1,800 Lapwing, a Knot (on 3 dates), up to 30 Sanderling (all month), 1-7 Little Stint (17th-29th), a Pectoral Sandpiper (16th-24th), 1-3 Curlew Sandpiper (4th-25th), up to 133 Dunlin, 1-3 Ruff (from 16th), 1-4 Snipe, 1-16 Black-tailed Godwit, a Bar-tailed Godwit (16th), 1-56 Whimbrel (until 22nd), up to 60 Curlew, 1-3 Spotted Redshank (from 16th), 55 Redshank, 1-2 Greenshank, at least 4 Green Sandpiper, 1-3 Wood Sandpiper (10th-28th), up to 20 Common Sandpiper and up to 25 Turnstone. Arctic Skuas were regular offshore (from 18th) and there were single reports of Long-tailed (30th) and Great Skua (19th). These were chasing Sandwich and Common Terns which were common all month, but Little Terns were last noted on 17th after a disastrous breeding season. There was a single juvenile Black Tern (17th & 19th). The last Cuckoo was on 22nd and the first autumn Whinchat was on 13th. There were up to 50 Wheatear, 500 Yellow Wagtail and 500 Linnet.

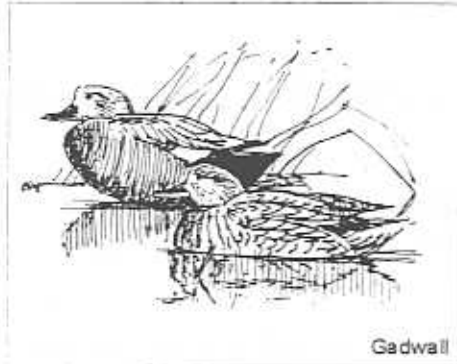
## September

Offshore there were small numbers of Gannets early in the month and a single Shag (24th). A Bittern was seen at Castle Water from mid-month and a single Little Egret (5th and 26th), the Flamingos were still present on 1st. Among the common ducks of interest were 130 Wigeon (22nd); 7 Pintail (28th); a Garganey (1st and 10th); 40 Pochard (11th); 1-2 Eider. Raptors were well represented with Kestrel and Sparrowhawk seen daily and a Marsh Harrier (22nd); Merlin (from 5th) and Hobby (until 26th); a Short-eared Owl (26th).

Waders provided much interest all month, the highlights being: 1 Little Ringed Plover (15th); 80 Ringed Plover (16th); 1-2 Knot (until 24th); 50 Sanderling (22nd); 12 Little Stints (21st), declining to just 2 by end of month; 15 Curlew Sandpipers (7th) then 3-8 until end of month; single Ruff on 4 dates; a Black-tailed Godwit (12th); 1-5 Spotted Redshank (24th - 30th); the last Common Sandpiper on 30th. Arctic Skuas were seen offshore on 3 dates (4 on 5th) and another Long-tailed Skua (1st). Sandwich and Common Terns were regular until 6th, but were infrequent until the end of the month. The last Swift was seen on 8th, but hirundines were present in large numbers all month. Tree Pipits and Grey Wagtails were seen flying over in small numbers mid-month. Redstarts were regular at the end of the month; there were small numbers of Whinchat and Wheatear present throughout the month; Stonechat numbers increased from mid-month.

## October

Wildfowl were well represented with peak counts of the common ducks of 32 Gadwall; 25 Pintail; 86 Shoveler and 50 Teal and 150 Wigeon.



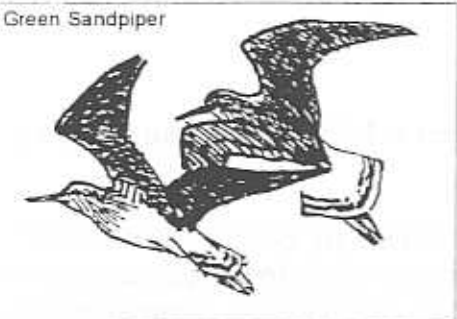
Gadwall



Wigeon

The first of the winter grebes to appear was a Black-necked Grebe (2nd). Kestrel, Merlin and Sparrowhawk were seen regularly throughout the month. There were also single records of Hobby, Marsh Harrier (10th) and Peregrine (19th). Waders continued to provide interest, the highlights were 3 Little Stints (2nd) then 1 until 13th; Spotted Redshank (2nd and 9th); 3 Jack Snipe (11th); 2 Greenshank (until 12th); single Green Sandpipers (all month) and a Grey Phalarope (30th). Summer migrants had departed by the end of the month with the last records: Redstart (1st); Yellow Wagtail and Lesser Whitethroat (2nd); Whinchat (5th); Turtle Dove (11th); Sand Martin (13th); House Martin (19th); Wheatear (23rd) and Swallow (26th). Other records of note included 3 Coal Tits (2nd); single Jays (5th, 10th and 24th); single Firecrest (13th) then 1-2 at Watch Cottage (14th-23rd).

Green Sandpiper



# The Sixties

by Tony Marr

The production of Part 1 of the Review has been delayed, and will not be available until next spring. In the meantime here is the account for the decade prior to the establishment of the Nature Reserve.

With the formation of the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) in 1962 came a surge of interest in the birds of the Rye Harbour area. Individuals and groups began to visit the area more regularly, and in the summer some unofficial watching at the tern colonies was put on a more formal footing by the SOS, who advertised the need for this through its newsletters.

Christopher Cummings from Eastbourne and friends watched over the vulnerable Common Tern colony at Northpoint Beach, on the east side of the River Rother near Camber, at weekends. There were threats to the terns from dinghy sailing on the pool, and to Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers around its shores from picnickers and dog walkers, attracted by its position very close to the main Rye to Camber Road.

Less regularly, some of the Beachy Head Ringing Group and Selsey Bill watchers used to drive over at weekends and sit on the edge of the Nook Beach pools to keep an eye on the Common Terns there. The main diurnal disturbance there was from walkers with dogs and from holiday makers wandering across the unfenced shingle, most of them unaware of the presence of the tern colony; egg collectors were also active in those days and caused some depredation of the nesting birds. No-one knew then about the impact of predators that was to become clear in later years.

These watchers obtained permission from Mr Gould, then owner of Rye Harbour Farm and Spun Concrete Works, to camp on his land, and were allowed to sleep in the hay in one of his barns in inclement weather. The area seemed wilder and more remote in those days, with far fewer visitors and holidaymakers than nowadays.

Although these efforts helped in a small way to safeguard the breeding birds, everybody concerned realised that some form of long-term protection was essential for the whole area. There were continuous threats of development and expansion of both industrial and leisure activities. There were noisy speedboats

on Castle Water. There were aircraft with floats taking off and landing from there, and flying low round and round over the beach area, causing frequent disturbance to nesting birds. There was talk of holiday companies eyeing the beach with a view to development of the type already present at Rye Harbour itself (caravan site) and at Camber Sands (holiday centre). The potential for nature conservation was enormous; the risk of development was even greater. How could these conflicting interests ever be reconciled? The fact that the whole area was already an SSSI seemed to carry no weight.

The SOS and the then Sussex Naturalists Trust (now Sussex Wildlife Trust) worked together to try to build a case for acquiring land as a nature reserve. Under the enthusiastic guidance of Guy Mountford, SOS President in the late 1960s, and Frank Penfold, Chairman of the Trust, work quietly went on in the background to prepare a persuasive proposal. Jack Harrison from Seaford, a retired solicitor, on behalf of the Trust, and Tony Marr, then living near Brighton, who was the SOS Secretary, worked closely together over a number of years in preparing the submission which went to the County Council.

Legislative opportunities for this arose in two ways. In September 1963, the Minister of Housing and Local Government issued Circular No. 56/63 under which all coastal planning authorities were required to make a special study of their coastal areas, in consultation with the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy (now English Nature).

In July 1965, the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) published a report, "Coastal Preservation and Development", which supported proposals put forward by the Sussex Naturalists Trust for the establishment of a Nature Reserve within the existing SSSI.

The 1970s and the establishment of the Nature Reserve in the next Newsletter.



# Dates for Your Diary - 1997

Please remember that the **first and third Tuesday** of every month is a **workparty** day. Meet at the Information Centre at 10am, return about 3pm. You can help with the practical management of the reserve, seeing places and wildlife that you may never see otherwise!! Please bring old, warm clothing, work gloves, lunch and a hot drink.

**Saturday 11th January**

## **Castle Water in Winter**

10am - 1pm. Meet at Brede Lock Car Park (TQ920198). Including a visit inside Camber Castle.

**Sunday 24th February**

## **A short birdwatching walk around the beach reserve**

Meet at Information Centre at 10am, return about 1pm.

**Saturday/Sunday  
22nd/23rd March**

## **Beach Clean**

A chance to clear the beach of the winter's rubbish and, perhaps, see your first Wheatear or Sandwich Tern. Meet at Information Centre at 10am, with work gloves, working until about 1pm.

**Sunday 27th April**



## **Annual Whimbrel Walk**

An early start to see one of the largest roosts of Whimbrel in Britain (peaked at 601 in 1996). Meet at Information Centre at 4.30am, returning about 11am.

**Saturday 17th May**

## **The Maritime Heritage Trail Birdwatch**

With good weather and luck this circular walk will find a VERY long list of birds for you. Lunch at the Castle. Meet at Information Centre at 8am, return about 2pm

**Saturday 14th June**

## **Wildlife Week - Bird & Moth Watch**

A short birdwatching walk, followed (weather permitting) by moth trapping near the Wader Pool after dark. Meet at Information Centre at 8pm, returning after dark.

**Sunday 13th July**



## **The Annual Cycling Tour of the Nature Reserve**

Please bring your own bicycle, lunch and energy. We will look at flowers, birds and insects. Lunch at the Castle. Meet at Information Centre at 10am, returning about 2pm.

**Wednesday 27th August**

## **Waders and other migrants at Pett Pools and Rye Harbour**

Meet at 9am at Pett Pools (TQ9014) or at 10am at Dog's Hill Road toilet block (TQ917160) for a circular walk around the Reserve, returning about 1pm.

**Saturday 27th September**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

At Winchelsea Beach Community Centre (next to the garage) 7.30pm.

**Sunday 5th October**

## **Autumn Birdwatching**

There should still be a mixture of summer and winter visitors to see on this walk to the Beach and Castle Water. Meet at Information Centre at 9am, returning about 2pm.

**Saturday 15th November**

## **Winter Ducks and Gulls**

A circular walk of the Beach Reserve. Meet at Information Centre at 2pm, returning about 4.30pm.

**In Focus** - Saturday 25th January and Sunday 2nd March. The binocular and telescope specialists will be at the Nature Reserve, near the Wader pool from 10 am until 4 pm. This is an ideal opportunity to compare equipment and decide which model is for you and get a trade in on your old equipment or simply have it cleaned/repaired.