

RHNR FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

833 LOTTERY FUNDS NEW DEFIBRILLATORS



The 833 Lottery Club has been running for a year now. It was conceived as another way for the Friends to raise money to help our new Discovery Centre.

It's called the 833 Lottery Club because we can sell 833 tickets a year. If all of them were taken up it would raise just under £12,000 for the Discovery Centre yearly.

Ticket holders are included in a monthly draw and have the chance to win one of three prizes, while the rest of the money goes directly to help the reserve.

So far the lottery has paid for two much needed defibrillators.

One is mobile and can be taken out on work parties. The other is permanently in the Discovery Centre itself. Less exciting, but just as necessary, purchases include new rubbish bins, which will be placed near the Discovery Centre picnic area.

Several more purchases are in the pipeline and we'll let you know about them when they are complete.

If you'd like to help the reserve even more... and have the chance to win a nice little prize for yourself, you can buy one ticket (you can have up to five).

Tickets cost £24 for 12 months, of which 60% will go towards the Discovery Centre and the rest is put into the monthly draw.

There are some restrictions on buying tickets, you cannot be under 16 years of age, and you cannot be either a member of the Friends' Committee or an administrator of The Club.

You can get a joining form at the Discovery Centre.

MYSTERIES OF THE CHALK CURVE

Enter the reserve from Winchelsea Beach and walk about 1km along the road, you'll pass on your left an area of bare shingle hummocks sloping down to a wet hollow before a brambly bank. These features record an historic tidal encroachment, perhaps in the 1930s, and its subsequent containment at a time when the sea defences were no more than a shingle bank.

At the top, you can see how the pebbles fan out as they were swept before the inrush of seawater, with gulleys between them draining to a dark triangle that still fills with seawater on tidal surges and is occupied by Saltmarsh Rush and Sea Milkwort. The rabbit-grazed turf on shallow soil over the lower slopes hosts a range of interesting plants including Slender Hare's-ear (so rare that seeds were collected for the Millennium Seed Bank last year) and dozens of old ant-hills, disturbed only by Green Woodpeckers.

The curved embankment was built with chalk since it's permeable and packs down easily. Similar features, dating back to the mediaeval period can be seen across the Romney Marshes wherever old sea-banks failed, the repairs curving to avoid deep pools scoured by the flood. Overgrown with Bramble and Elder, this bank is now a favourite perch for Stonechats, which swoop down to pick insects from the thin turf.



NEW FILMS ABOUT THE RESERVE

Sussex Wildlife Trust has commissioned several short films about the reserve

FIND OUT MORE ON PAGES 4 AND 7

A LASTING LEGACY



Most members of the *Friends* would be surprised to discover that a large percentage of the money we have at our disposal to help improve the reserve and its work comes from legacies.

Currently as much as 40% of all our funds comes through the generous amounts that people have left the *Friends* in their wills. This comes both from former members of the *Friends* and from others who nominate the *Friends* as a recipient of a certain sum as a legacy.

It's a delicate subject, it's not something that we talk about very often, but the *Friends* are incredibly grateful when they are remembered in legacies. This money is always well spent.

The clearest example of this is the largest legacy we have ever been given, which helped to make the Discovery Centre a reality. Due to the amazing thoughtfulness and generosity of Joy Layton (a member of whose family still lives in Rye Harbour) we were able to donate around £1.5M to the centre project.

In the past, accumulated legacy income has paid for 2 Watch Cottages and contributed towards a large part of the purchase of Castle Water; now reclaimed from a gravel dredging site and turned into the fantastic mosaic of special habitats that it is today.

In general legacies are spent on items that either improve the infrastructure of the reserve and its various habitats or improve the ability of staff to do their jobs. These have included the electric mule (above, a bequest from member Lynn Jenkins), Landrovers (seen right with the 833 Lottery-funded defibrillator), other vehicles including the purchase of an electric bike. They also help maintain the fences, the many benches, steps, paths and hides here.

Of course the benches and hides themselves are often the direct result of a legacy, such as the Steve Denny hide overlooking the Quarry. This was built and later restored in Steve's memory – he was a long serving vice-chairman of the *Friends* committee.

If you are considering leaving a gift to the reserve in your will, thank you very much, we are incredibly grateful.

There is more than one way to leave a legacy. You could choose to leave a *residuary gift*, which is a percentage of your estate that remains once any specified gifts have been made to friends and family. Its value will be dependent on the value of your estate at any given time rather than a set amount. You can also choose a *pecuniary gift*, which is a set sum of money, or you can choose to make a *specific gift*, which might be a personal possession such as buildings, land, or something like stocks and shares.

If you have already written a will but would like to add a legacy for the reserve you simply need to ask a solicitor to add a codicil to your existing will that includes the name of the charity and what you'd like to leave. In this case it would be *Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve* and we are: Registered charity no. 269535 at the address on the back page.

If there are any specific items you'd like your money to be spent on, simply include that in the codicil. In the past legators have wanted money to be spent on educational items or specific objects such as a digital projector to improve the *Friends'* talks.

As mentioned before, it's a sensitive topic and one we don't talk about much, but we do want to let legators and potential legators know just how grateful we are... and to let you know that your gift will make a real difference to improving the reserve, protecting rare wildlife and promoting education about the natural world. Thank you!



VISITOR NUMBERS ARE INCREASING



One of the things that regular visitors to the reserve have noticed over the last few years is that there are a lot more of us here!

Well before the opening of the Discovery Centre and even before the pandemic, visitors to the reserve were on the increase.

This is partly due to the rising popularity of 'coastal living' and visitors enjoying being by the sea and partly because people have discovered that most of the reserve has dry paths where you don't need to fight through mud even in the depths of winter. Rye Harbour offers an easy, flat, dry walk all year round.

Of course, since the first *Lockdown* many more people have begun to value the natural world and to realise the huge impact on both mental and physical well-being of a walk outdoors. When we weren't allowed to go out except for an hour a day, we all remembered how important the outdoor world was to us.

No one should underestimate the impact of a walk on a sunny, blustery day, watching flocks of Golden Plover wheel over glittering water. It's uplifting, energising and restorative and that is why so many more people are enjoying coming to the reserve.

Of course *Lockdown* also encouraged people to search for and discover new places to go. Large numbers of people who would normally have preferred to go abroad are currently choosing destinations closer to home and Rye Harbour is

one of the most popular. It will be interesting to observe whether the lifting of all travel restrictions makes a difference to numbers. Will people return to sun-seeking, or will they continue to holiday in the UK?

The harbour has a lot to offer visitors with its shop, pub, cafes and art gallery and since the opening of the Discovery Centre there is even more.

It makes a huge difference to less mobile visitors to know that the Centre is warm, comfortable and has clean loos that are accessible to all. The fact that there is also so much to learn, beautiful things to buy in the shop and a cafe that offers delicious coffees, teas and home-made food, just makes it even more appealing.

Another factor that contributes to the growing popularity of Rye Harbour is the Icklesham Parish car park. This and the village toilets are run by the parish for visitors and funded by visitor donations and are not connected with the reserve. The parish fervently wants to maintain the car park on a donations basis rather than having to charge, so please keep dropping your money into the blue donations posts.

For the most part it is a delight that more people are visiting, loving and learning about this special place, but there are inevitably some downsides. The huge numbers that have been going through the Centre cafe have meant that sometimes there are unavoidable delays... there may not be enough seating, the cafe may run out of certain items.

We ask all visitors to be patient and, more importantly, to treat the staff kindly. Some of them are volunteers and they are doing everything they can to make your visit enjoyable.

The other result of *Lockdown* that has caused issues is the large number of people who bought a dog for company during that time. Almost all dog owners are responsible: we thank them for picking up their dog's poo and for keeping their dogs on leads to protect any ground nesting birds (and other visitors who may not want to greet a large, boisterous friendly animal): everyone is welcome.

There are however a small number who think that because the reserve is a natural environment it is ok to leave their dog's faeces along the paths down to the beach and to let their dogs run off where they can't be kept under control. We'd like to remind everyone that Lucy often takes school groups into the grass looking for 'mini-beasts' and the last thing anyone wants is for a child to get ill after contacting dog poo.

Almost every summer several dogs, not on leads, fall over the edge of the river bank and down into the Rother. Rescues are incredibly stressful for the owners and often involve the necessity of calling out the RNLI. Keeping your dog on a lead is safer for your dog.

That said it is a wonderful thing to see so many people enjoying the reserve. Almost all the feedback from visitors is positive; more than that it is often really enthusiastic, especially from people who haven't discovered the reserve before. Many have said it was a revelation and that they will be coming back. Lets hope that as people learn to really love this area they'll help to protect it.

CHRIS ON THE RESERVE



In December a team from the *Mammal Society* came to carry out a survey for Harvest Mice on the reserve and met with much success! This elusive and secretive mouse is Europe's smallest rodent and the only one with a prehensile tail which it uses to help climb grass stems. It typically occurs in cereal fields (though will use a range of grassy habitats) and in the past would have been encountered in numbers during harvest time, hence its name. Harvest Mice have been known to occur on the reserve for many years though the number of records was limited. However, the survey on a small part of Harbour Farm on the 5th found over 20 nests, both old and new.

There was little in the way of invertebrate sightings during December, though a freshly dead male Minotaur Beetle at the Discovery Centre on the 7th was only the fifth reserve record and the first ever male!



Top: Harvest Mouse
Above: Minotaur Beetle

A good range of waders were recorded in December, with most of the big counts during the monthly *Wetland Birds Survey*. This included 1500+ Golden Plover, 900+ Lapwing and 250+ Oystercatcher, while 200+ Dunlin and 42 Ringed Plover were present on the shore on the 12th. Best of the bunch wader-wise were three Avocet on Flat Beach on the 26th, a Jack Snipe at Castle Water on the 23rd and up to 10 Ruff, also at Castle Water. Waterfowl highlights this month were a Cattle Egret at



Castle Farm on several dates early in the month and a male Red-crested Pochard on Castle Water on the 24th. In addition, a Great Northern Diver was present on Long Pit from the 19th to the end of the month, with a 'redhead' Goosander here from the 16th to 19th and the long-staying Black-necked Grebe. More details can be found at :

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/december-2021-rye-harbour-nature-reserve-sightings>

CHRIS FEATURES IN NEW FILM



Our warden Chris Bentley is well known for his love of and expertise in identifying invertebrates. Chris can be found in all weather looking for unusual beetles, spiders, bees and of course... flies.

A new film by Neil Pringle, one of several commissioned by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, shows Chris going about one of his typical winter searches and describing the sense of pleasure and satisfaction he gets in



finding creatures in their habitat.

"There's a surprising amount of things to find in winter," Chris tells us in the film. "Provided you know where you're looking." He goes on to explain that, as is often the case in Rye Harbour, things which are very rare in other parts of the country may be fairly plentiful here. This includes the rare ground beetle *Cymindis axillaris* that can be found on the reserve. Chris regularly leads walks and enjoys the huge scope of topics the reserve offers. "On our walks you can talk about anything," he said.

If you'd like to see the film visit: <https://www.facebook.com/RyeHarbourNR/videos/>

WANDERING WILDLIFE WITH PHIL JONES

THE LITTLE TERN

Little Terns have always been very important birds for the reserve. They are much smaller than other terns and have an obvious white forehead, a black line through the eye and a yellow bill with a black tip, which fades in late July or early August.



Since the start of the reserve, wardens and volunteers have put in thousands of hours protecting the birds that attempt to nest most years. Little Terns now nest on the shingle inside the electric fence and their favourite area is viewable from near the red-roofed hut. They feed mostly at sea and close to the shore. Their main food is small fish, crustaceans and insects and the terns usually hover before diving into the water.

In the UK the species is of amber concern, which is largely due to their decreasing success at coastal breeding sites: usually a result of disturbance by people and foxes. Globally however Little Terns have a huge range with colonies as far away as Australia. At Rye Harbour the number of breeding pairs has varied from zero in some years, to 76 pairs in 1985. Last year seven pairs raised seven young to the flying stage. Here on the reserve, the species has only reached the level of what is considered a self-sustaining population in 14 of the last 50 years. In some years it is lack of suitable food and in others predation by foxes, badgers, Kestrels or Little Owls.

Little Terns are summer migrants that typically arrive in mid-May and depart from July until September. They winter in coastal West Africa. The earliest to be recorded on the reserve was on 4th April 1981 whilst the latest were three seen on 2nd October 1999. The oldest bird was 27 years old although the typical lifespan is about twelve years.

In the UK nearly all birds nest just above the high tide line on either sand or shingle. Elsewhere they use large rivers and even lakes. They usually start breeding in their third year having spent their first summer in West Africa and their second touring the breeding colonies of Europe. The female lays two or three eggs and typically incubates them for three weeks, with the young birds fledging in a further 19 or 20 days.



The young leave the nest within a couple of days and will then hide in the shingle or nearby vegetation. Both parents look after the young and are always very vocal on their breeding grounds. It's their chattering call that really makes a Rye Harbour summer.

THE BIRD ON THE NEW FRIENDS' BADGES

"What's the bird?" some people asked as I handed them their shiny new Friends' pin-badges, "An Avocet? Oh no, that's the RSPB. Is it a tern? But which one?"



It came as a surprise to me that not everyone knew the answer, since the Little Tern is a bird tied in to the history of the Nature Reserve and to the Friends in particular.

On the edge of its geographical range at Rye Harbour, and with its preferred breeding habitat of pebbly beach increasingly popular for recreation, the Little Tern is now particularly vulnerable. Apart from inadvertent disturbance and trampling of nests by humans and dogs, another danger faced these birds, in the reserve's early days: egg-collecting, a Victorian expression of interest which has now largely died out.

To counter these threats, naturalists began, from the 1960s onwards to guard the colonial nests, at first by parking out on the shingle to warn or deter potential intruders. With the creation of the nature reserve, a watchers' rota was organised and a *Tern Watch* caravan stationed out there to serve the double function of surveillance and public engagement. Protection of these beautiful little seabirds became an important focus of the Friends' activities, presenting not only volunteer involvement in wildlife conservation, but an opportunity for prolonged contemplation of the reserve's open landscape, its spectacular dusks, nights and dawns

With intensifying use of the beach, temporary fencing became necessary and then the longer-term solution of creating suitable nest-sites within the electrically fenced area (but sometimes the birds will still return to jeopardy on the beach).

So Little Terns are on the badge to record the sense of joint purpose they gave to the Friends during those years. The background blue triangle, by the way, shows the shape of the original Rye Harbour *Site of Special Scientific Interest*.



ORCHIDS ON THE RESERVE

Words and pictures by Pat Bonham

Orchids are very special flowers: often strange, beautiful and rare, though even the commonest are always lovely to see.

Here in the UK we have 52 species of *Orchidaceae*, including the helleborines, twayblades and lady's tresses, out of about 70 species in northern Europe.

Of those 52, McClintock and Fitter in their *Collins Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers* list five as common and widespread, 15 as locally common, 17 as scarce and local and no fewer than 15 as 'real rarities growing in only a few places and usually rare even there'. Perhaps that's why so many keen birders take up orchid-finding but never get hooked on other plants.

Orchids are perennials growing in much the same places each year from a creeping fleshy rootstock or pair of tubers, but flowering varies enormously from year to year.

Last year was exceptional for orchids on the reserve, with amazing displays of at least 5000 Pyramidal, 2000 Common Spotted, 500 Bee and a few Southern Marsh Orchids, plus two colonies each of 1000 plus Marsh Helleborines (see sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/marsh-helleborine) and 100 or so spikes of Autumn Lady's Tresses.

Rye Harbour is now probably the only site left in Sussex for Marsh Helleborines. The first colony, near Ternery Pool, has grown from only 15 spikes in 1990 to more than 1000 last year, and a second colony has only recently been discovered in the Castle Water wetlands.

Flowering times depend on the season, but Common Spotted and Bee Orchids usually peak in mid-June. To find them look along the flood defence between the caravan park and the new saltmarsh.

Last year there were literally thousands of Pyramidal Orchids around the northern part of Castle Water but they were very late, into July; normally they flower from



early June. Marsh Helleborines are fully out in mid-July. Autumn Lady's Tresses come into flower in late August, but they are small and can be hard to spot in the grass around the bench at the north-west corner of Castle Water.

Whether it's for their beauty, their rarity or their unpredictability, orchids are always worth looking out for.

Top left: Common Spotted Orchid
 Top right: Detail Common Spotted Orchid
 Middle left: Bee Orchid
 Middle right: Bee orchid in grass
 Above left: Pyramidal Orchid
 Above Right: Autumn Lady's Tresses

NEWS AND PROJECTS

WHAT YOU THINK

NEW FILMS ABOUT THE RESERVE



The Sussex Wildlife Trust has had a series of films made about the reserve.

Film-maker Neil Pringle spent several days at Rye Harbour shooting footage inside the building, around the hides and at Castle Water. He featured the Friends' committee, volunteers, reserve staff and members of the public. Three films have now been released. The first shows committee members talking about their love of and commitment to the reserve, the second featured warden Chris Bently (see page 4) and the third shows the volunteers.

In each case Neil interviewed people doing what they really enjoy: helping the reserve.

It's clear from the interviews just how much our volunteers love the reserve and enjoy giving their time and energy to making this very special place even better.



To watch the films visit:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS7CegFxDZn-e-cob7Aj1eKp8ToYIN4xm>
and simply click on the video to start it. By the time this newsletter arrives there maybe more films to enjoy at the address above

FRIENDS' WEBSITE UPDATE

The newly revamped Friends' website is up and running at <https://www.rhnrfriends.co.uk> Drop by to find out all about our various projects and how we put your money to good use. If you're feeling generous you can make a donation so we can do even more...



NEW BINS ARE ON THE WAY

Two lots of useful bins are being funded by the Friends for the reserve.

The 833 Lottery Club will be providing much needed rubbish bins for the outside picnic area next to the centre. These will be designed so that, as much as possible, they are in keeping with the exterior of the building. Much more importantly they will be gull and wind proof so that rubbish cannot be pulled out or blown out to fly around the reserve.

We all know how harmful plastic litter is to wildlife so we hope you will all recycle plastic waste within the building at the recycling point next to the cafe serving area.

The Friends will also be funding more dog waste bins to replace some of the inadequate ones. It isn't a pleasant topic but the Friends devote a lot of time to trying to solve the ongoing problem of dog faeces on the reserve.

Please dog owners, if you love walking here, pick up after your dog!

"I love this walk from the car park at the top. All the way down to the beach. I like collecting shells and breathing in the glorious fresh sea air. It's so peaceful."

Beverley K

NEW FRIENDS' BOOK IN THE PIPELINE

Friends' publications have proven very popular with members and visitors alike and so we are going to be producing a new book this year; *Seaside Flowers of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve*.

We're planning on creating a beautiful photographic record of the amazing plants you can see when you visit but, more than that, we want to show how plants connect to the landscape, the human population and the wildlife of the area.

The book will be filled with fascinating stories. There are tales of plants back from the brink of existence now doing spectacularly well here, of rare invertebrates which will only feed on one particular plant and of other plants that undertake a risky life right on the very shoreline itself, where one storm too many could eradicate them for ever.

As yet we don't have a publication date but we will keep you up to date on when it will be available at the Discovery Centre.



ABOUT THE FRIENDS

The Friends work in partnership with Sussex Wildlife Trust, other local organisations and landowners through a management committee to agree the way forward for Rye Harbour Nature Reserve.

The Friends now have more than 2,000 members who make a big difference to the reserve by providing funds, but many also give their time as volunteers to support the work of the reserve staff. Friends are kept informed about the reserve with three of these newsletters per year and staff organise exclusive guided walks for members.

The Friends are involved in a huge range of activities on the reserve. They help fund staff and equipment, they help with outdoor workparties, with educational activities, they staff the information desk at the Discovery Centre, they produce and post out the newsletter, manage membership and organise great talks and events. The Friends have also funded five hides on the reserve, all of which are accessible.

The Friends funded the original purchase of Lime Kiln Cottage, the installation of the temporary information centre and, most importantly, the initial contribution of £1.5M towards the Discovery Centre Project. Friends' donations helped to buy Castle Water and to transform it from a gravel dredging site to the amazing reedbed that it is today.

They also pay for vehicles and machinery to maintain the reserve. Friends contribute annually to providing staff on the reserve so that we have a wide variety of fun activities for adults and children alike.

Friends volunteers have helped offer information to visitors for many years. Staff regularly lead volunteer work parties to litter-pick, create and maintain habitat such as the wader pools and reedbeds and to help out with the various jobs that need to be done on the reserve.

The Friends are an amazing group... thanks for being one of us.

FRIENDS' EVENTS

27th March 9 am MARCH ALONG THE LEVEL

A beach walk along the sea wall to Pett pools and back. (approx 3 hours)

Meet 9am at the Pett level Beach Club

17th April 9 am SPRING'S HERE!

A long (approx 5-6 km) walk round the whole reserve. Bring a packed lunch and drinks as we'll be out about 6 hours

Meet 9am at Rye Harbour Car Park

May 22nd May 9am HARRIERS WALK

a walk from the viewpoint out to the Halpin hide hoping to catch some Marsh Harrier activity and witness a possible food pass

meet at 9am at the Veiwpoint

19th June 9am 'FEATHERS' DAY WALK

a guided walk around Flat Beach .

Meet 9am at Rye Harbour Car Park

24th July 9am COUNTING CHICKS

a count of the chicks around the beach reserve

Meet 9am at Rye Harbour Car Park

14th August 9am TO HARBOUR FARM

an extended walk around Flat Beach heading out to the Barn pools. 9am at Rye Harbour Car Park

GUIDE IN THE HIDE (10 AM - 4PM AT THE GOODERS HIDE)

Saturday 16th April

Sunday 15th May

Saturday 18th June

Saturday 2nd July

Saturday 16th July

Monday 1 August

Friday 26th August

Keep up with what's going on:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Friendsofryeharbournaturereserve

www.facebook.com/RyeHarbourNR

FRIENDS ADDRESS:

Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve
c/o 2 Watch Cottages, Nook Beach, Winchelsea, TN36 4LU

Contact SWT staff at :
rhnroffice@sussexwt.org.uk

FRIENDS' COMMITTEE

Chair Cliff Dean
Vice Chair John Barnes
Secretary John Baker
Treasurer Mike Russell

Committee:

John Willsher, Linda Wren, Catherine Emmitt, Phil Jones, James Tomlinson, John Trowell

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ABOUT THE RESERVE

www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour

THE NEWSLETTER

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