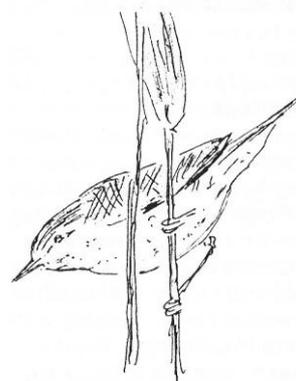


PEVENSEY LEVELS AND ITS BIRD LIFE

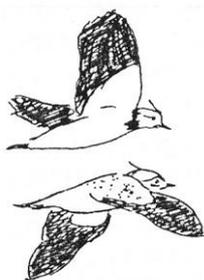
By Derek Potter

The Pevensey Levels are a 10,000 acre wetland which was first known by its present name in a 10th century charter, at which time it was salt marsh.

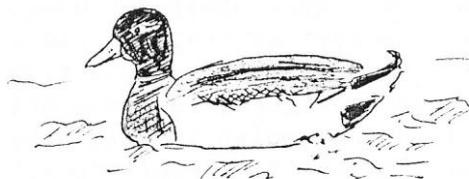
The antiquity of the area is reflected in some of the modern names, notably among the many "eye" suffixes. "Eyes" are islands, from the Saxon "Ig" and this leads to a clear understanding of the origins of the site. Manxey was originally Monks Island; Horse Eye and Mountney being literally the Horse Island and the Mountainous Island. These would have been real islands when the marsh was still tidal. The Domesday Survey recorded many salt works in the Hoe area although land reclamation was taking place well before the thirteenth century.



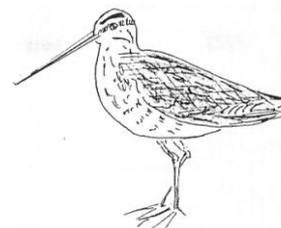
Grazing was introduced when land became available and the levels were almost all pasture in the mid-sixteenth century. Flooding was a problem as reliable drainage was unknown. Today the Pevensey Levels are a mixture of pasture and quite large areas of arable land, with many drainage ditches.



This means that the Levels are now rarely flooded in winter and in the nesting season many cattle and sheep are grazing, which do not allow ground nesting birds much chance of success. The nesting birds are Yellow Wagtail, Reed and Sedge Warblers in the bank-side reeds, plus Mallard and an occasional Teal, and of course the Mute Swan. On the meadows we have Snipe, Redshank and Lapwing.



In the winter the Redshank moves on to be replaced by even more Lapwing, up to 2,000, and in a severe winter, Golden Plover, Widgeon and more Teal. In the bushes on the edges of The Levels, apart from the usual birds, we have Redwing and Fieldfare.



On a still winter's afternoon, you may see a pair of Short-Eared Owls drifting low across the Levels, or even a Hen Harrier. Over the last few years, excessive drainage, intense grazing and also cereal farming have greatly restricted suitable nesting sites.

