Chapter 24

Tim Appleton MBE – Thirty Years of Rutland Water Nature Reserve

Sue Howlett and Robert Ovens

Background

Tim Appleton is the manager of Rutland Water Nature Reserve, but he is not just the man whose inspiration and dedication have given bird-life a spectacular presence across Rutland Water. He has also become a global conservationist and a driving force in the battle to save wetlands all over the world.

Tim Appleton's achievements were rewarded by an MBE in the 2004 New Year's Honours List for services to wildlife and nature conservation, an award which absolutely stunned him, but one of which he is very proud. He is very keen to make sure that everyone knows about it because he sees it as a reward for all those who have contributed so much in making Rutland Water the wonderful place that it has become.

Tim Appleton (right) with Bill Oddie (TA)

Tim was born at Westbury-on-Trym, near Bristol, Avon, and attended Wells Cathedral School in Somerset. He studied zoology and botany at Bristol Technical College, and his career in nature conservation began in the late 1960s when he started work at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, where he was involved with deer management. In 1970 he became a deputy curator, working with Sir Peter Scott at The Wildfowl Trust, now known as The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, on the River Severn estuary. After four years he moved to Peakirk, near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, as warden for what is now Peakirk Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, but within ten months he was back at Slimbridge and in charge of the whole site. But soon he was ready for an even greater challenge, and it came with the birth of Rutland Water.

The shock announcement of a new reservoir to be constructed in the middle of Rutland galvanised nature-lovers across the county into action. The Rutland Natural History Society was founded in February 1965, and its first major project was to record and photograph the flora and fauna of the Gwash Valley, soon to be lost for ever (*see* Chapter 23 – Fauna and Flora before Rutland Water). But plans were in hand to ensure that a wonderful new wildlife sanctuary would compensate for the inevitable loss of a natural habitat. According to the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust:

'Rutland Water Nature Reserve is unique in that it was declared a reserve before it existed. The wildlife potential of the proposed reservoir was recognised as early as 1969. Reserve boundaries and the construction of lagoons were formulated in 1972, and in 1975 the Trust signed a management agreement with the Welland and Nene Division of the Anglian Water Authority, later to become Anglian Water.'

A Warden was needed who could bring valuable experience of wetland habitat combined with visionary organisational skills to the new Nature Reserve. The man who fitted the bill, as Warden and later Reserve Manager, was the young Tim Appleton who was appointed in 1975.

The rest of this article is based on a talk given by Tim Appleton to Rutland Natural History Society on 5th January 2006, with additional information provided by Alison Rogers, former Reserve Education Officer.

From Green Fields to Ramsar

In the 30 years since Tim Appleton was appointed to manage the new Rutland Water Nature Reserve, amazing transformations have taken place. Against the backdrop of elm-covered Lax Hill, green fields once lined the old road between Lyndon and Hambleton, divided by flourishing hedgerows. But in the area soon to be covered by water, crops had to be harvested for the last time, buildings demolished, families displaced, trees and hedges removed and the rich, fertile topsoil carried away in lorry-loads. For about six years, it looked like a huge prairie. The droughts of 1975 and 1976 meant that only a small quantity of water accumulated behind the dam, but serious pumping began the following year, and in March 1979 Rutland Water was filled to the top water line for the first time. Even before it flooded, the reservoir began to attract huge varieties of bird species. Amazing sights included two or three hundred Corn Buntings at a single time, coming into roost around the old Burley Fishponds.

Ada and Arthur Parker's cottage at Middle Hambleton was demolished to make way for the reservoir (Edna Locke)

Downstream of Bull Bridge in 1976. The water level is just beginning to rise (Jim Levisohn ARPS)

Left: Lyndon Hill towards Lax Hill in 1975 (TA)

Lax Hill and Manton Bay from Lyndon Hill. The reservoir had reached its top water level by March 1979 (TA)

Above: Corn Buntings could be seen at Burley Fishponds before the reservoir was flooded (John Wright)

In Tim Appleton's words: 'All these things were going on, and it was an extraordinary time to be around the reservoir, and to see history disappearing, and history in a way being made.' Rutland Water was soon brought to international attention by the vast numbers of duck that began to arrive in the years following its completion. Counts of over 20,000 waterfowl were noted, and with the inclusion of gulls there were probably up to forty or fifty thousand birds recorded on some winter nights. The largest number of Great Crested Grebe ever recorded at a single site in England, Scotland or Wales was seen on Rutland Water, when over a thousand were counted at one time. Most of these birds are seen around the Nature Reserve, although large numbers of many species also appear in other areas of the reservoir, including in the main basin by the dam.

Great numbers of two species in particular, Gadwall and Shoveler, led to the site's designation by the European Bird Directive as a Special Protection Area, which has implications for future developments of the reservoir. Up to 900 Shoveler have been recorded, and up to 2,000 Gadwall, making Rutland Water probably the most important site in Britain for these two species. The reservoir was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and by 1992 had become a Ramsar site – a wetland of international importance, named from the Iranian city where the Ramsar Convention was signed in 1971.

Right: The largest number of Great Crested Grebe ever recorded at a single site in England, Scotland or Wales was seen on Rutland Water in the late 1970s (TA)

Great numbers of Gadwall, seen here, and Shoveler led to the site's designation as a Special Protection Area (John Wright)

A male Shoveler at Rutland Water. Its large spatula-shaped bill makes it easy to identify (RO)

Meeting Different Needs

Given the potential disturbance from the one million people per year enjoying Rutland Water's numerous recreational facilities, this great influx of birds is even more remarkable. Some 200,000 cyclists and countless walkers use the perimeter track annually. The reservoir is a national fly-fishing centre, with the World Fly-Fishing Championships held here. The Sailing Club at Edith Weston provides training for some of our Olympic sailors, and now with all the wonderful sailing facilities for disabled people, it is becoming more and more important.

Many anglers come to fish at Rutland Water (TA)

So why are so many birds able to use this site, alongside these human activities? Even before the reservoir was being flooded, the Reservoir Users' Panel was set up to focus on what people, with their different needs, would actually be wanting from the reservoir. Representatives of different interest groups met. The fishermen said, naturally, 'We'd like to fish everywhere', and the sailors said, 'Well, we'd like to sail in most places, but of course, if we capsize in the shallow end, our masts get stuck!' Nature Reserve representatives said, 'Well, the shallow end is great for us, but of course diving ducks need deeper water'.

Rutland Water is a world famous sailing venue (Richard Adams)

So, by agreement, the reservoir was divided up to accommodate different needs in different areas. Sailing would be allowed over about 2,000 acres of water, but beyond a certain point yachts with their bright sails were kept out, so that birds would be undisturbed. Fishing boats, causing less disturbance, could venture further into the shallow ends of the reservoir. However, in the three lagoons near Egleton, neither bank and boat fishing nor sailing and wind surfing were allowed.

In addition to what was achieved at the Nature Reserve, this agreement for shared use of the reservoir proved so successful, that, according to former Reserve Education Officer, Alison Rogers:

'Rutland Water is a world-famous fishery and we have international matches held there. Several members of England's Fly Fishing Teams, both Able-Bodied and Disabled, work at Rutland Water. It is also a world-famous sailing venue, because of the shape of the reservoir. The Hambleton Peninsula comes almost down the centre, making it more or less a horseshoe shape. This means that there are all sorts of different wind conditions, making it challenging sailing for Olympic sailors as well as novices. So Rutland Water has that reputation of marrying those two things together with its primary purpose which, of course, is supplying water.'

Creating the Nature Reserve

In the early 1970s, major construction work was carried out around the eastern end of the reservoir. The great earth dam took about five years to build. Two towers were constructed, one in the north arm and one in the open area near the dam, as well as a complex system of pipes which would take water to the pumping station at Empingham or the treatment works at Wing. Meanwhile at the western end, a very different kind of construction was taking shape. To make a desirable habitat which would attract as many species as possible, specific wetland areas needed to be artificially created. These took the form of lagoons, designed and constructed before the reservoir was filled.

When Tim Appleton was appointed Reserve Warden in 1975, he suddenly found himself obliged to become a temporary construction engineer. With no experience whatsoever, he took charge of building the big clay wall, in order to construct three large lagoons near Egleton. Clay was dug out with huge machines from a massive borrow-pit just below Hambleton, over a period of several weeks. Despite opposition, the new Warden insisted that the lagoons were constructed with curves, bends and extensions out from the main body of the clay wall. These would form what he then called 'Duckling Survival Bays'. Over the years these nooks and crannies have helped to give the lagoons the character which they still have today.

Building the lagoons in October 1975 (TA)

Above: Building the bunds in December 1975 (TA)

Right: May 1976. A water control point in the canalized section for regulating the water levels in the lagoons (TA)

Clay was built up in three layers into bunds or embankments which would retain water in the shallow areas, even in the driest season. Hardcore from demolished houses was spread on areas over which water was expected to flow, with topsoil on the areas remaining above water level. Much of this stone gradually washed away, and the bunds required later reinforcement by riprap, rocks used as bank protection, along the main water edges. There was a canalized section going back into the village of Egleton, with water control points by which the water levels within the lagoons could be manipulated. After waiting eighteen months, special grasses were planted that would help to stabilise the banks, and then the water was slowly let in, using all the catchment water from the hills at the back of Egleton.

One of the great benefits of having the Warden in place right from the outset was that any waste material which might have been taken off site could be utilised, reducing costs to some extent. Whenever Tim Appleton saw a lorry loaded high with earth or rubble travelling along the old Nether Hambleton to Egleton road he would stop the driver and persuade him to tip his load at the side of the road. It was then used to form the islands that can be seen throughout the Reserve today. One such island was constructed in front of Swan Hide, which is at Gibbet Gorse.

Above: When these houses at Nether Hambleton were demolished in 1975 some of the hardcore was used to form islands in the Nature Reserve (TA)

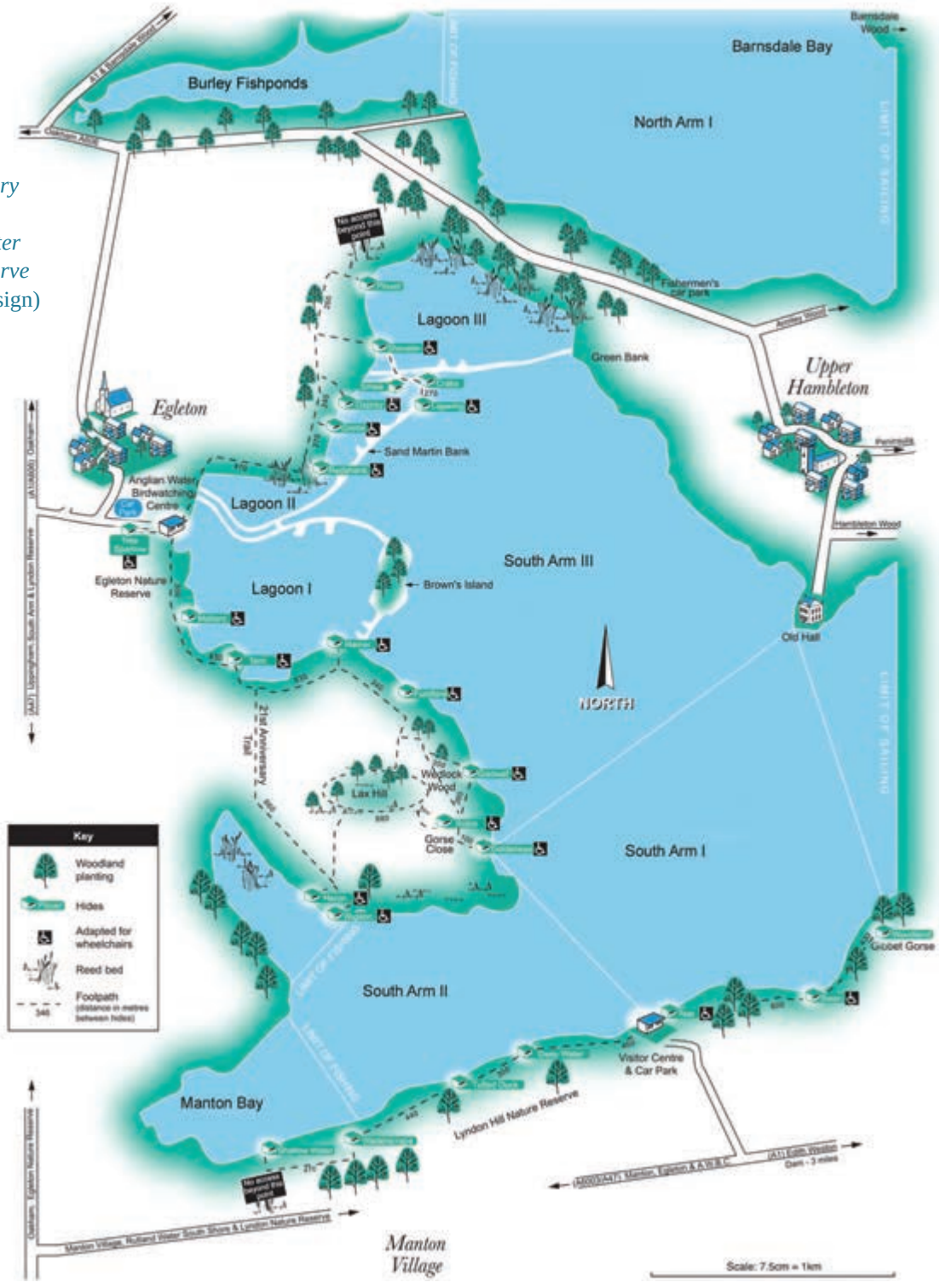
Right: The island being constructed in front of Swan Hide at Gibbet Gorse in 1975 (TA)

The lagoon islands in 1980, near the old Egleton to Nether Hambleton road (Jim Eaton)

Lagoon I in October 1976 (TA)

Three sanctuary areas were created to form the Nature Reserve: the southern shoreline by the Lyndon Hill Nature Reserve; the old Burley Fishponds in the north arm of the reservoir; and the main reserve area at Egleton. In Tim Appleton's words:

'. . . the shoreline of the Lyndon Hill Nature Reserve, is really underrated. I almost don't want to tell you about it because it's such a good area. It has all the water birds, but it has all the small birds as well. In the Spring, just go down to Gibbet Gorse and listen to the Nightingales, and enjoy the Whitethroats and the Grasshopper Warblers. There is so much to see there. And then we have our main "birdy" area, the Egleton Nature Reserve, and the quieter old Burley Fishponds area in the north arm.'



The sanctuary areas of the Rutland Water Nature Reserve (Shirley Design)

The Burley Fishponds area of the Nature Reserve (RO)

Over the first four winters many thousands of new trees of many different species were planted around the new Nature Reserve. Some of these have now grown to between 30 and 40 feet high, and the Willows have been coppiced twice over the years. The reservoir's Landscape Architect, Dame Sylvia Crowe, provided a great deal of valuable advice. Further advice as well as help with the planting was provided by Guy Messenger. However, most of the tree-planting was completed with the help of the local community. Friends and colleagues were press-ganged by the Warden, along with anyone who happened to go past that looked as though they needed some exercise! Pupils from Oakham and Uppingham Schools, and later the Community Colleges, also became involved. A voluntary warden scheme was also established and this has gone from strength to strength.

The service track near Egleton car park in 1975. It is now lined with tall Ash trees (TA)

It was always important to try to envisage what the Reserve would look like in twenty years' time. By planting different types of Willow together with Poplars or other taller trees to provide varied canopy levels, a mosaic of different habitats was achieved. This is why the Reserve, along with all the other habitats, is so remarkably diverse.

Young Willow trees (Salix) *planted with the help of volunteers from the local community* (TA)

The Reed Beds

Close to the Warden's Cottage, along the old road to Stamford, were the Burley Fishponds, now part of Rutland Water Nature Reserve. A wonderful avenue of Lime trees once lined the edge of the ponds, which were largely covered with reed. With the coming of the reservoir, it was important to try and save as much as possible. Although the trees were felled, different organisations were involved in moving plants, such as Primroses and Bluebells. Staff at the Nature Reserve were anxious to save some of the reeds to establish a reed bed by the new lagoons. In the 1970s, reed beds were fairly few and far between in Britain. Since the 1980s, up to £22 million has been spent by conservation societies on trying to restore reed beds as habitat for Bitterns. At present this is working out at about half a million pounds a Bittern!

Right: The avenue of Lime trees which were felled at the edge of Burley Fishponds (TA)

Above: Rutland Water at low level in 2005. These tree stumps mark the location of the former avenue of Lime trees at Burley Fishponds (RO)

The new reed bed, covering almost 35 acres, is one of the biggest reed beds in the East Midlands. It originates from clumps of reed taken from the Burley Fishponds in the summer of 1976. Machinery was used to create the shallow areas in which to plant the reeds. Clumps of reed were put into the lagoon where they needed protecting by volunteers from hordes of Canada Geese! As the reed beds grew bigger and bigger, more money was made available for the project, and now there is a healthy population of Reed Warblers and other species associated with this rich habitat.

Right: Digging Phragmites *rhizomes at Burley Fishponds for planting in the new reed beds in May 1976* (TA)

Scraping out one of the shallow areas to create the new reed beds in February 1975 (TA)

The new reed beds were established by December 1976 (TA)

Martyn Aspinall, now Head Warden, and Helen Dixon protecting the young reeds from Canada Geese (TA)

A Bittern on its nest. The target is to have these birds staying and breeding at Rutland Water (TA)

Above: A Reed Warbler at nest in one of the new reed beds (TA)

Right: A Reed Bunting seen at the new reed beds (John Wright)

For more than eighteen years and using the same length of nets, a ringing group has operated at the reedbeds recording and ringing up to a 1,000 birds each year. This recording contributes enormously to knowledge of the bird population, the survival rate and the longevity of many resident as well as migratory birds. The target, of course, is to have Bitterns not only coming in during the winter months as they do at present, but staying and breeding. This may not happen for a few years, but things are improving for the Bittern, and hopefully in another five to ten years it might be a bird that is heard booming in Rutland. If so, that might be the first booming Bittern ever heard in Rutland.

Reserve Volunteers

In those early days there was of course much interest from various people. After four years of working on the Reserve it was possible at last to see water actually approaching.

May 1976. The tip of water creeps along the south arm towards Lax Hill, but it still has a long way to go (TA)

It was important to prepare the habitat: preparing the trails, locating the hides and planting trees. At this stage volunteers were again being sought. As there was little funding to spare, everything was done as cheaply as possible. Tim Appleton recalls the day he met David Needham:

'I remember meeting a young man and heard that he was a carpenter. From that day he'll probably regret ever meeting me! Because he then became our head craftsman, and along with one or two other people, was the stalwart of so much of the early work of this Nature Reserve. I'm really grateful to all those people who help and guide me.'

October 1976. Water crosses the Hambleton to Lyndon road for the first time (TA)

Tim Pridmore, the first Assistant Warden, erecting a nest box (TA)

One of the 'kennel' nesting boxes for Barn Owls (TA)

Tim Pridmore was the first Assistant Warden to be appointed and began working at the Nature Reserve as a volunteer, aged about seventeen. He helped to put up huge numbers of nest boxes, right from the beginning. Most of the trees were new, only a few feet tall, but nest boxes were hung wherever there was an old tree or something big enough to hang a nest box on. Years later, other volunteers helped to build 'the world's largest nest box' to encourage Sand Martins to breed at the Reserve. This proved so successful that, in 2005, about 90 pairs successfully bred in it.

A Sand Martin at one of its more traditional nesting sites (TA)

Volunteers, under the direction of Head Warden Martyn Aspinall, building 'the world's largest nest box' to encourage Sand Martins to breed at the Reserve (TA)

The completed Sand Martin wall in 2000. In 2005 about 90 pairs successfully bred in it (TA)

Volunteering on the Nature Reserve can, however, have its less glamorous aspects, as described by Alison Rogers:

'One of my friends came back from the first day of ringing Sand Martin chicks . . . and they came in and they just stood there. They were as lousy as you could possibly be, because some of the parasites on the young Sand Martin chicks, had been transferred to these two macho ringers. They were looking very bedraggled and very miserable about the whole affair. So ringing Sand Martin chicks was not a favourite activity. Nor was ringing the Cormorants, because if Cormorants don't like what you're up to, they will eject foul-smelling oily residue from either end. So if you're coming up in a boat underneath the Cormorant colony, then you might well need an umbrella!'

A Cormorant with young: '. . . if Cormorants don't like what you're up to, they will eject foul-smelling oily residue from either end' (TA)

Volunteers, especially those who are ready for any kind of challenge, have always been essential to the work of the Nature Reserve. Many who began as young helpers on the Reserve went on to work in conservation. Volunteer numbers continue to grow steadily – in 2005 more than 365 volunteers helped in one way or another. So many people have worked at Rutland Water over the 30 years of its existence that Tim Appleton and Martyn Aspinall (Head Warden) talked about writing a book to pay tribute to the hundreds remembered only by their first names. It was to be called 'We never knew their last name'!

A group of young volunteers take a break after a hard day coppicing near Lagoon II (TA)

The Hides

In the 30 years of Rutland Water, some of the hides are now being replaced. One of the earliest, Mallard Hide, was originally built by staff and volunteers from reclaimed telegraph poles and the cheapest possible or donated wood, and with a felt-covered roof. The only access was by a steep ladder! It has recently been rebuilt nearer to the water, with disabled access. In 1979 Fieldfare Hide was donated by Rutland Natural History Society, and that was the very first thirty-foot hide, double the length of the original hides. This meant that, as more visitors flocked to visit the Reserve, more could be accommodated to watch the birds. Today the same hide is still in place, but with raised ramps for wheelchair access.

Above: Tim Appleton working on Mallard Hide near Lagoon I in 1978 (TA)

Left: Opening Fieldfare Hide which was donated by Rutland Natural History Society in 1979 (TA)

One vivid memory of Plover Hide is recalled by Tim Appleton:

'One regular visitor was a lady pharmacist from Oakham, who used to come in her lunch hour to watch birds from Plover Hide. Sadly she died and for a long time her husband couldn't decide what to do with the ashes. In the end, his family told him to take them off the shelf, and bring them down to the Nature Reserve. Her friends and family were all sitting huddled in the hide, on a windy day, wondering what to do. Finally one bird-watching friend, who had popped over from Oakham in his lunch hour, said, "Oh, Dammit!" and threw the ashes out of the window of the hide. It was an easterly wind and it all blew back in, all over us. Believe me, we all went away smiling.'

Building Plover Hide (TA)

After many years it became clear that the hides were getting overcrowded, and pressure was felt to provide more. The result was the largest of all, Lapwing Hide, reached by a great walkway. The first winter following completion of this major project, disaster struck when it was blown down in a storm, and had to be rebuilt using considerably stronger posts! Fortunately most of the materials were salvaged, despite much having blown over the

Lapwing Hide, the largest of all the hides when it was built (TA)

water to Hambleton. The rebuilt hide was opened by Lord Cranbrook, who became Chairman of English Nature, one of many dignitaries who have graced the Reserve over the years. More hides were built, including Swan Hide on the Lyndon Hill Nature Reserve, with attention now being paid to improving access for disabled visitors. These were growing in numbers, and it was essential to give them equal access to the whole of the Reserve. Ramps were built to improve access, and the Rutland Lions Club donated the first wheelchair for visitors' use. Now, with the help of three organisations, Anglian Water, the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society and the Wildlife Trust, Rutland Water has become the first reserve anywhere in Britain to provide an electric buggy, which can take any less mobile visitors as far as Lax Hill.

Right: Tim Appleton with Lord Cranbrook at the official opening of Lapwing Hide (TA)

Above: Improved access for disabled visitors (TA)

Right: Building Swan Hide on the Lyndon Hill Nature Reserve (TA)

Above: Rutland Water was the first reserve in Britain to provide an electric buggy for less mobile visitors (TA)

Breeding and Diversity

As well as erecting bird boxes in the early years, feeders were regularly provided throughout the year. This policy led to a very healthy population of Tree Sparrows – probably the biggest population in Britain now occurs in the Rutland Water area. As a result of this, Anglian Water, RSPB and English Nature funded a project to investigate the reasons. The project findings, recently published, demonstrate that, as well as nest boxes, all-year-round feeding is vitally important. Because these Tree Sparrows are constantly able to find food, they are always in good condition, so that they are able then to have second and third broods. In the countryside, where there has been a dramatic decline of natural food for such birds, many do not successfully rear even one brood. This has led to almost a 95 per cent reduction in the Tree Sparrow population in less than twenty years.

As the years progressed and more money became available, especially during the 1990s, many improvements took place. With the use of mechanical diggers and scrapers, and some help from visiting children, water was brought closer to some of the hides. Harrier Hide, which was once some distance from the water, now has new 'scrapes' in front of the hide where Little Egrets feed along the edge for much of the summer. Such new and varied habitats mean that birds which in the past rarely nested inland now come to breed at Rutland Water. Three or four pairs of Oystercatchers now breed annually, while Little Ringed Plovers have also become regular breeders. The reed beds have been expanded, and the new wader scrapes are working well, encouraging a wide range of wading birds at almost any time of year. Because nature is very quick at colonising these areas, scrapes are difficult to manage and need regular clearing.

A Rutland Water Tree Sparrow (TA)

Diggers on the scrape at Harrier Hide in October 1982 (TA)

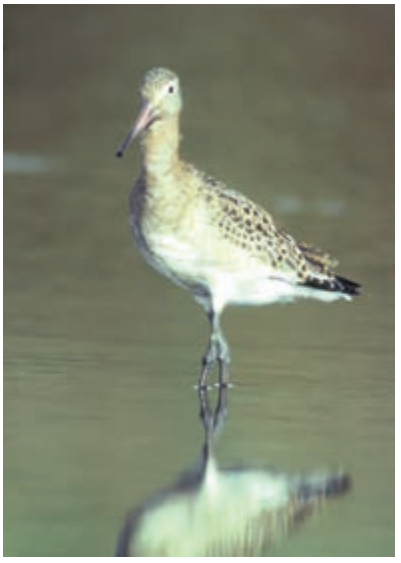
Left: Oystercatcher (TA)

Below: Little Ringed Plover (TA)

Bottom right: Black Tailed Godwit (TA)

Bottom left: Curlew (TA)

The wading bird record was broken in September 2005 when 21 different species were seen on the Reserve in one day, an unusually high number for an inland site. Little Ringed Plovers are already breeding here and Black-tailed Godwits are seen during most of the year. Although they have not yet bred at Rutland Water, it is hoped that improvements in grassland management will encourage this species to start to breed here in the next few years. Curlews are now breeding elsewhere in the UK and unexpectedly over-wintering in Rutland. On the muddy shore at Lyndon two or three thousand Golden Plovers can be seen at times, a wonderful sight when caught by the sun as they rise and circle around.

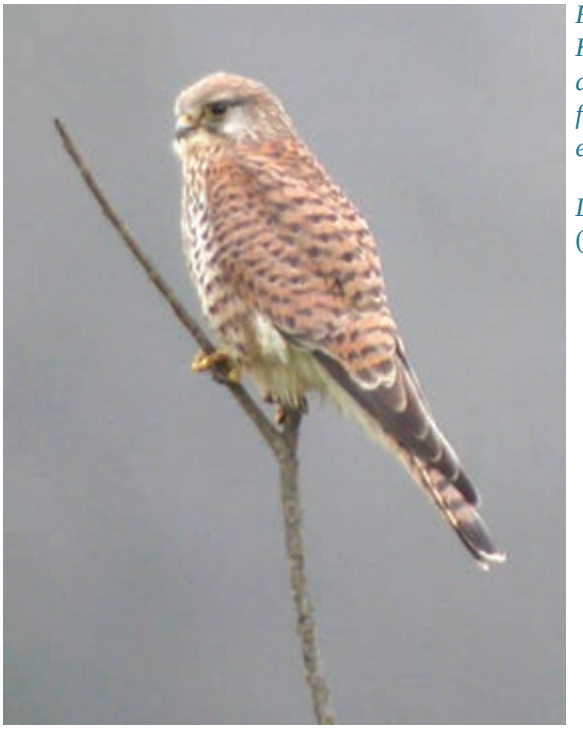


An unexpected arrival has been that of tree-nesting Cormorants, thought to be of the European Sinensis race. Four arrived in Rutland in about 1977, their rings indicating that they originated from Abberton Reservoir, Essex. The inland appearance of these birds was such an extraordinary sight that local people flocked to see them. In 1994 over 1,200 were seen on one day. Up to 120 pairs of Cormorants now breed at the Burley Fishponds every year, producing very healthy offspring, but they are not very popular with the fishermen.

A cross-eyed Sparrowhawk at nest (TA)

Another arrival, in this case unwelcome to pigeon-fanciers, has been the Sparrowhawk, whose population 30 years ago had been greatly reduced as a result of the use of chemical pesticides. The first recorded Sparrowhawk appeared at Rutland Water in 1979, and since then it has become almost as common as the Kestrel. Similarly, Buzzards were rarely seen before the 1990s, but are now seen almost daily. Red Kites, introduced recently into Rockingham Forest, now circle above the woodlands of Rutland, especially in the spring. In past years, Long-eared Owls have roosted near Gadwall Hide, while Kingfishers have returned to inhabit the banks of the new lagoons.

A Buzzard with its prey (TA)



Far Left: A Kingfisher after a successful fishing expedition (TA)

Left: A Kestrel (TA)

Providing for Visitors

As public awareness and the number of visitors increased, so did the regular arrival of coach parties. Originally the Birdwatching Centre at Egleton was based in a small wooden shack, measuring 8ft by 12ft. This was replaced by a larger Portakabin, in which it became possible to run a shop and provide more support to visitors.

In 1984, a grant was received from the Local Authority and other sources, to start construction of the first purpose-built centre which became the Lyndon Hill Visitors' Centre. The new Centre was opened by Sir David Attenborough, who, as Patron of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, has played a very active part in the Reserve over the years.

The Portakabin which replaced a wooden hut to become the new Birdwatching Centre in Egleton car park (TA)

Work started on the Lyndon Hill Visitors' Centre early in 1984 (TA)

The Lyndon Hill Visitors' Centre was completed by September 1984 (TA)

Close to the Lyndon Hill Vistors' Centre, where children are encouraged to join a Watch Group, are ponds, with Common and Great Crested Newts. A more recent development is the wild flower meadow, where up to 10,000 Common Spotted Orchids now flourish every summer, with many other wild flowers and all the insects and butterflies that might be expected in a traditional meadow. Since Rutland now has very few traditional meadows remaining, this has proved a very valuable contribution to the environment. The Reserve is also nationally important as a habitat for Dragonflies and Damselflies, with fifteen or sixteen species recorded.

The new Lyndon Hill Visitors' Centre provided an opportunity to hold more public events. These began with Book Fairs and Wildflower Sales, raising money for the Wildlife Trust. There was also the County Bird Race which raised money for various projects and the annual prize-giving ceremony for this national event was hosted by the Centre. The total number of different species seen during bird races within the county of Rutland is now between 150 and 160.

The Bird Race in 1984. Martyn Aspinall (Warden), Chris Park (Assistant Warden) and Terry Mitcham (Rutland Natural History Society) (TA)

The Bird Races started a friendship that began many years ago between Tim Appleton and Bill Oddie, now known locally as the 'Little and Large Show'. Bill Oddie is a good friend to the Nature Reserve who never misses the annual Birdfair, and helps in any way he can. With growing interest in the huge numbers of birds visiting Rutland Water, Terry Mitcham produced a book, published in 1984: *Birds of Rutland and its Reservoirs*. The public launch of this book, with interviews on the shore at Lyndon, was one of the many highlights of Rutland Water's first decade.

The Nature Reserve entered a new era with the construction of yet another Centre. Tim Appleton proudly observes, 'There can't be too many reserves in Britain that have got two centres!' The Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre at Egleton was designed as a facility for all. 'We were already looking at how we could create a Centre for everybody to enjoy, so there would be disabled access, windows at the bottom level and a great gallery at the top where people could get up and watch birds at the start of their birdwatching tour of the Reserve. It does have fantastic views out onto Lagoons I and II where people can see male Smew and other wildfowl. On a nice cold day, what better place to come, putting your backside close to the radiators and enjoying the birds.'

Bill Oddie never misses the annual Birdfair (TA)

The new Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre was opened by Lady Scott on 4th September 1992, during the Birdwatching Fair.

Terry Mitcham being interviewed at the launch of his book Birds of Rutland and its Reservoirs (TA)

The new Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre at Egleton under construction. It was designed as a facility for everybody to enjoy (TA)

The viewing gallery at the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre just after it was opened (TA)

The reception area at the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre (TA)

The plaque recording the opening of the new Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre at Egleton (RO)

Alison Rogers remembers a visit to the Centre by the Duke of Edinburgh while the Queen was visiting Oakham. Sixty-four children from Brooke Hill Primary School, Oakham, were also there working on environmental projects and designing posters. Prince Philip, wearing a suit, was accompanied by his aide-de-camp and others wearing smart uniforms. One child pulled the trouser leg of the one not in uniform and said, 'Which one's the Duke of Edinburgh?', to which the response was, 'I am!'

Unwelcome Arrivals

Rutland Water has been fortunate in not, as yet, seeing many of the controversial North American Ruddy Duck. In other regions, their interbreeding has threatened endangered species such as the White-headed Duck. Anglian Water does not allow shooting of birds on its reservoirs, although in other areas of the UK, culling of Ruddy Ducks is now allowed. A more pressing problem at Rutland Water is the large number of Egyptian Geese, which take over many nest boxes and nest-holes, squeezing out Owls and other birds – these geese even nest on the Osprey platforms! However the most unwelcome arrival was the blue-green algae of the late 1980s, which killed up to twenty or thirty sheep and ten dogs. The Reservoir had to be closed for almost a month. Fortunately the algae had no impact on the fish or the birds, but the biggest surprise was that, without any sailing, fishing or cycling, the normal bird population of around 12,500 leapt up within six days to around 19,500.

Egyptian Geese are unwelcome arrivals at Rutland Water (TA)

The Osprey Project

Centuries ago, Ospreys – beautiful fish-eating birds of prey – lived in this area. One of the woods on the Exton Estate is actually called Osprey Wood. But no Ospreys had bred in England since 1850 when the last ones were recorded on the Somerset Levels, although brief visitors were sighted near Burley Fishponds in the late 1800s (*see* Chapter 26 – A New Home for the Osprey).

However, a few years after Rutland Water changed the landscape of the East Midlands, Ospreys were observed flying over the reservoir on their migration to nest sites in Scotland. With plenty of Trout in the water below, it seemed a wonderful hope that one day they might return to Rutland, so in 1982 an artificial nest platform was built on Lax Hill. Finally, one pair arrived in 1994, and stayed throughout the whole summer. This was the impetus for a determined programme to reintroduce the Osprey to Rutland. The translocation programme, only the second ever attempted worldwide, began in 1996, with 64 Osprey chicks taken over several years under licence from sustainable Scottish nests. Roy Dennis was a stalwart in helping with the project, and advising on the various types of monitoring devices used to follow the birds, including satellite tags as they moved south on their migration.

The most unwelcome arrival at Rutland Water was the blue-green algae of the late 1980s, which killed many sheep and ten dogs (TA)

Chris Park, Assistant Warden, inspects an artificial Osprey nest at Lax Hill (TA)

Left: Tim Appleton and Tim Mackrill, who was to become Osprey Project Officer, weigh an Osprey chick (TA)

Osprey chicks relocated from Scotland were reared in these cages (TA)

Three Osprey chicks having just been ringed (TA)

Alison Rogers describes helping to fit a radio monitor and antenna onto a young Osprey which had been found in Norfolk. The bird was held down in a towel to avoid injury from the ferocious talons and beak. Super-glue was used to glue the antenna along the central tail feather. The satellite monitors were put on with little Teflon straps, rather like a jacket, because they needed to be really secure when the bird dived into the water. They were sewn on in the expectation that, after a couple of years, both the battery and the degradable cotton stitching would have failed. But while the equipment lasted, the bird could be tracked, providing valuable information about the migration routes of this endangered species.

The release of the Osprey chicks brought a huge amount of attention to the reservoir, as people flocked to see such rare birds. A recent survey carried out by a student for her MA Dissertation shows that around £600,000 is now being injected into the local economy by 'Osprey Tourism' in Rutland.

The good news is that the translocated Osprey chicks did eventually return to Rutland. They started nest building and reared the first chick in England in 2001. In the years up to 2006, fourteen chicks have been reared and have migrated. The first chick was named, by a children's competition, 'Aqua', but sadly it never returned. Because more male than female adult Ospreys returned to breed in Rutland each summer, steps were taken to redress the imbalance. In the summer of 2005, eleven young Ospreys, nine females and two males, were translocated from Scotland. It is hoped that, when they return in a few years, more breeding nests will be established at Rutland Water.

With funding from a national company in 2005, Tim Mackrill began a three-year full-time contract as Osprey Project Officer. Funds were also donated to install a camera on the nest, so that live pictures can be seen in the Centre. They can also be seen on the project website, which also has all the latest news of the Ospreys as well as the story of the project so far.

In 2006 the first Rutland-born chicks arrived back at Rutland Water – a major milestone in the Osprey translocation project (*see* Chapter 26 – A New Home for the Osprey).

To some addicts, the unfolding story of the relationships and experiences of the Rutland Ospreys can be more riveting than any soap opera!

Egleton Meadows

In the summer months, there are not only Ospreys to observe, but many wonderful things happening on the Reserve. Great pride has been taken in developing the Egleton meadows, which are now some of the finest in Leicestershire and Rutland. Surrounded by beautiful hedgerows, they are ideal for bats flying down to the reservoir to feed, or just feeding along the tops of these tall hedges. Butterflies abound, and the meadows are perfect for the Yellow Wagtails and other birds that arrive in the Spring, because no chemical herbicide or insecticides are put down. The new herd of Dexter Cattle now produce some really healthy cow-pats! Because the Dexters do not require worming, no chemicals pass into the cowpats which can then be broken down by beetles. This not only improves grazing but provides insects for many birds. In particular it has resulted in an ideal habitat for Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank which now breed in this area.

Lapwing now breed in the ideal habitat which resulted from the introduction of the Dexter herd (TA)

Although the meadows look very natural, they have to be actively managed. Almost every day of the year, volunteers and staff are out there doing different types of management work, such as grass cutting or working with a tractor. Some of these volunteers are able to work for NVQ Level II qualification in Conservation Management, with a member of the Reserve staff as assessor. So not only are they doing valuable work baling hay for feeding to the cows during the winter months, but they are learning about Conservation Management and may go on to pursue careers in this profession.

The new herd of Dexter Cattle now produce some really healthy cow-pats which provide insects for many birds (TA)

Managing the meadows. A volunteer mows the hay in one of the meadows (TA)

Volunteers baling the hay for winter cattle feed (TA)

Working with the Community

When the reservoir was being constructed, many thousands of trees were planted by whole groups of people ranging from school children to prisoners, to pensioners. In more recent years, several companies have become involved with the Nature Reserve, paying for employees to have a day out and work together on team-building exercises, such as the erection of a new hide in the wood at Gibbet Gorse. Local companies have provided materials, such as the high-class glass and window frames, so people can enjoy watching the badgers. There are now a number of active badger setts on the Reserve, monitored by the Leicester Badger Group and other volunteers. The joys of badger watching are described by Alison Rogers, former Education Officer at the Reserve:

'We would take groups of people into the badger hide which had an infra-red lamp, and we would sit there watching the badgers in the early evening and sometimes the late evening. And on one memorable occasion, we had put peanuts and molasses out to encourage the badgers to come to the same place where we could see them every evening. A rat arrived to take the easy food we had left out, and then a Barn Owl came and took the rat! So – nature red in tooth and claw, I think!'

Above: A badger emerges from one of the active setts at Rutland Water (TA)

For around twenty years the Reserve has also worked with HM Prison at Ashwell. Inmates arrive on their own bicycles, with their many different skills – some more interesting than others! Many of them have learned skills relating to the building trade, and have helped to restore the old Cow Yard by the Burley Fishponds.

Right: The badger hide at Gibbet Gorse (TA)

Tim Appleton tells of a memorable episode which occurred when staff at the Reserve needed an electric grinder to sharpen tools, rather than using a whetstone which took hours. One of the prisoners offered to help by providing an electric grindstone, which was gratefully accepted. About two days later he returned with a little engine and electric grinder, which worked perfectly. In Tim Appleton's words: 'Anyway, he left, and that winter when I took the tumble dryer out of the shed – I don't use a tumble dryer in the summer – I thought it was pretty light . . . he'd nicked the engine of my tumble drier! And I thought, "Well, there we go!"'

The Burley Hovel

Local thatchers and volunteers from the Reserve restored a wonderful old hovel on the edge of Burley Fishponds in 1992. This rare building is one of the few hovels anywhere in Britain actually built into a dry stone wall. It was in a very poor condition, but local thatchers gave their time free and provided reed for the thatch. Sadly the reed did not come from Burley Fishponds but from Romania!

The Burley Hovel before being restored in 1992 (TA)

The Burley Hovel with its new thatch almost completed (TA)

Managing Woodlands

The Nature Reserve has always worked in very strong partnership with Anglian Water, who recently agreed to allow the Reserve to manage the woodlands around Rutland Water. These areas include Barnsdale Wood, Hambleton Wood and Armley Wood. Tim Appleton comments:

'If you haven't been in Hambleton Wood, shame upon you! If you have, in the Spring, you'll know that it's one of the most wonderful experiences you'll ever have in woodland – the scent of the Bluebells in the evening, the Nightingales singing, and all due to the particular kind of habitat.'

Hambleton Wood in the Spring (TA)

Much of the habitat was changing, and active management was required. Large areas have recently been coppiced. However, most of these coppiced woodlands need to be fenced off, otherwise the new shoots springing from the remaining tree stumps (or stools), get completely eaten down by little Muntjac Deer which are becoming numerous in Britain. Each year following coppicing, the young shoots and Bluebells will do well, with the addition of Primroses and other plants that were lying completely dormant in the wood; they now have space and light to re-emerge.

Muntjac Deer are becoming numerous in Britain (TA)

The intention is to coppice one plot in the woodland every year, and on a 15-20 year rotation the woodland may be restored to the way it was probably managed in the past. Log piles are left to provide habitat for beetles and bugs, as the wood rots down. Some of the logs have also been used in the past to make charcoal. Rutland Water was innovative in being one of the first Reserves in Britain to start producing charcoal. The charcoal was sold, making several thousand pounds each year. This lapsed for a period but is likely to start again in the future.

Pollarding, cutting back branches of a tree to its trunk to encourage denser growth, is also carried out. Tim Appleton is a great believer in pollards, observing, 'I think they look good, they're typical water-edge management, and eventually those large stools up there will provide nests for Mallard and other birds like wintering roosting Wrens.'

Charcoal burning on the Reserve (TA)

The Birdfair

From small beginnings many years ago, Rutland Water's annual Birdfair has become a major part of the life and work of Tim Appleton and his team. It began with a visit to the Game Fair, when Tim Appleton realised that many events were provided for people involved in outside activities such as shooting and fishing. However, there was very little for people who liked nature and birdwatching. This led to the first British Birdwatching Fair, held in a little marquee in the field at Egleton in 1989. It has now grown, under its new name of 'Birdfair', to become one of the biggest tented events in Britain, and the world's largest bird fair. The original idea was for the fair to be a kind of trade fair, to show what this massive industry has to offer. Now, such bird fairs are springing up literally all over the world, as far away as India and Madagascar, with organisers writing to the Rutland Water Nature Reserve asking for support and advice.

Every year, Birdfair at Rutland Water raises huge amounts of money for environmental causes, now totalling nearly one and a half million pounds. It began by supporting European projects, but now money is raised for projects as far away as Ecuador, Burma and Vietnam, where a reserve has been set up to protect the rare Vietnamese Pheasant. Support comes from leading conservationists around the world, and particularly the Reserve's good friend, Sir David Attenborough. The many international guest speakers have included the King of the Cameroon, a very lively character who could have talked for hours. With visitors from Palestine and Israel sharing their love of wildlife, there are no barriers at the Birdfair, just a wonderful opportunity for people to talk about the things that they believe in. All this combines with fun, entertainment and memorable events.

Left: The many international guest speakers at the annual Birdfair have included the King of the Cameroon, a very lively character (TA)

Right: Michael Warren working on his Puffin painting at the 2006 Birdfair (RO)

Above: Anglian Water commissioned Ptolemy Elrington to create a collection of river creature sculptures made entirely out of discarded shopping trolleys. These were exhibited for the first time at the 2006 Birdfair and two examples are shown here (RO)

Colin Woolf puts the final touches to one of his paintings at the 2006 Birdfair (RO)

Above: Seriously large optics for birdwatching seen at the 2006 Birdfair (RO)

Ken Smith carves another decoy at the 2006 Birdfair (RO)

This aerial photograph shows the extent of the 2006 Birdfair (John Nowell, Zodiac Publishing)

Birdfair Projects – the BirdLife International Partnership

Each year since 1992, money raised by the Rutland Water Birdfair goes towards a special project, enabling some remarkable conservation achievements, including the creation of national parks and helping birds under threat of extinction. Here are details of just some recent projects:

2000 – Saving the Albatross

Up to 300,000 seabirds are ensnared and drowned every year as they scavenge behind fishing vessels trying to snatch bait as the fishing lines are set. Albatrosses are the most threatened and, of the 24 species, 16 are globally threatened. Birdfair 2000 raised £122,000 for this campaign.

Artist John Cox painting a mural to raise funds for the Albatross project in South Africa at the 2000 Birdfair (TA)

2001 – Saving a Unique Caribbean Wilderness

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean with more than 350 species of native birds, but the unique habitat is threatened by agriculture, urban development, lumber production and mining. The £135,000 raised at the 2001 Birdfair was used to purchase essential equipment for the project.

2002 – Saving Sumatra's Last Lowland Rainforests

Sumatra's lowland rainforests are rapidly disappearing and many of the spectacular birds that depend on them face extinction. The £147,000 raised by Birdfair 2002 has helped BirdLife Indonesia to undertake surveys and consultations in order to prepare the feasibility study for the Sumatra Initiative.

2003 – Saving Madagascar's Fragile Wetlands

Madagascar has a unique flora and fauna and many of the native bird species are threatened, especially those living in Madagascar's wetlands. The record sum of £157,000 raised at the 2003 British Birdwatching Fair was used by BirdLife International to launch the Madagascar Wetland Conservation Programme.

2004 – Saving Northern Peru's Dry Forests

The geographic complexity of north-western Peru has created a great diversity of habitats, including mangroves, desert, three types of dry forest, as well as subtropical forest. The £164,000 raised at the 2004 Birdfair has been used to initiate a project that focuses on conserving the critically threatened species and their habitats.

2005 – Saving Gurney's Pittas and their Forest Home

By 1980 it was thought that the Gurney's Pitta was extinct as it had not been seen in the wild for half a century, its decline being due to the loss of ninety-five per cent of its home, the rainforest-cloaked Thailand peninsula. Painstaking detective work, however, led to the re-discovery of about 45 pairs at Khao Nor Chuchi, Thailand, in 1986. Money raised at the 2005 Birdfair supported the ongoing conservation work.

2006 – Saving the Pacific's Parrots

In the Pacific Islands, bird species are becoming extinct at a higher rate than anywhere else in the world. The biggest threat is from invasive alien species, notably black rats and cats. Proceeds from the 2006 Birdfair will be used to support a project to address these overall threats.

Ian and Richard Lewington working on the mural at the 2006 Birdfair to raise funds for the Pacific Parrots project (RO)

Rare Birds in Rutland

For Tim Appleton, one of the joys of birding is that you can go every day and see birds such as Mallard or Teal, and get a lot of pleasure: 'But then, suddenly, up might come a lovely male Smew, right in front of you when you least expect it!' In 1977, at the Manton osier bed before it flooded, he identified the first Cetti's Warbler to be seen in Rutland. The appearance of the first White-winged Black Tern caused huge excitement – large numbers of people came down to see this unusual bird collecting insects along the shore, as the water rose up by Normanton Church. Another bird that Tim Appleton will never forget is the first and only Night heron, a juvenile that spent most of the winter at Burley Fishponds, hardly seen until it was forced up by the cold weather. Sadly, it died, despite sprats and other food being thrown to it, and lies in state in Leicester Museum.

The first Cetti's Warbler was found at Manton osier bed before it flooded (TA)

Other memorable events include the Red-throated Pipit seen from Mallard Hide in 1982, probably the only one in Leicestershire and Rutland, and the sight of a Nightjar which spent a day in the Egleton car park. One exciting day, a Great White Egret arrived, one of three different Great White Egrets that have appeared over the years. Every now and again a number of Spoonbills arrive, and perhaps in the future this species may breed at Rutland Water. A rare Bluethroat, the only one ever seen in Rutland, was caught in a net. One spectacular bird, a little Red-footed Falcon, spent several days around Lagoon III, sitting on the posts where it was easily photographed.

What could have been the most spectacular start for Rutland Water occurred when a pair of Avocets arrived, several years ago, the first time they had spread out from their traditional coastal homes. They started breeding here and laid four eggs. At the time, this was the first fresh-water breeding of Avocets anywhere in the world. But the Coot came in and ate their four eggs. They tried laying elsewhere, but once again the Coot took the next set of four eggs. Had these survived, they could well have been the start of a

big population at Rutland Water, because the Avocets went on to breed at several sites elsewhere. There was food for them at Rutland Water, they just needed to break the mould, but it never quite happened. Other coastal birds have been unexpected arrivals at this inland site. These include a Guillemot, normally found nesting on steep rocky cliffs, and an even stranger Little Auk, blown inland by storms and washed up on the shore of Rutland Water.

Education Programme

Rutland Water Nature Reserve offers courses for students of all ages. People from this country and abroad come to learn skills such as hedge-laying. Links have been made with a number of organisations and universities from Norway to Southern Spain, whereby students come for two, three or even five weeks a year, to learn English and to work alongside other volunteers.

People from this country and abroad learn skills such as hedge-laying (TA)

Over the years, many local children have taken part in a very active Education Programme at the Nature Reserve. In 1997 Alison Rogers began part-time work, assisting the Education Officer as a Teacher Naturalist, employed by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Two years later she was promoted to become Anglian Water's Education Officer for Rutland Water, as well as Manager of the new Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre at Egleton. This appointment meant that she was heavily involved in the building of the new Centre at the beginning of the millennium.

Mute Swans and young (John Wright)

2001 was the year in which Foot-and-Mouth disease hit Rutland, and the reservoir was closed for 58 days. The only people allowed on the site were builders doing the construction work. The weather that February was atrocious, cold and wet with a very high water table and mud everywhere. However, when the work was completed there was a new Education Centre and brand new offices overlooking the reservoir. As Alison Rogers remembers:

'One of the things you notice when sitting in an office is things like ice, and the number of times I came into work to find Swans frozen in the lagoon. They had perhaps been there from 4 o'clock in the morning and they waited till 11 o'clock, or 12 o'clock till the ice thawed and they could go off. It didn't seem to bother them at all. We were just amazed to see these Mute Swans sitting still in the ice, just waiting for it to thaw.'

Proposed gardens for wildlife to be made near the Birdwatching Centre (RO)

Among Alison Rogers' most enjoyable jobs was taking groups of children round and showing them things they did not know existed, like looking under leaves and finding butterfly eggs, or looking at flies, beetles and other insects under a microscope or magnifying glass to discover that there were hooks on their feet that gripped.

Students from playgroup to university age regularly visit the Nature Reserve, investigating different aspects related to their curriculum. If they are lucky, this may be followed in the second part of the day by a visit to the Butterfly and Aquatic Centre at Sykes Lane or the Watersports Centre at Whitwell.

The Rewards of Vision, Energy and Enthusiasm

The success of Rutland Water Nature Reserve over the past 30 years has been closely linked to the vision, energy and enthusiasm of Tim Appleton and his team of staff and volunteers. The green fields of the Gwash Valley under the reservoir may be no more, and they are still missed by many. But in their place a unique lake has been created providing pleasure for many thousands of locals and visitors every year, as well as a world-famous sanctuary for some of our most threatened wildlife. For all the varied species that have benefited from Rutland Water, the future is looking good.