



Wharfedale  
Naturalists

# A YEAR IN NATURE 2023

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INSECTS



FLORA



BIRDS



MAMMALS



CONSERVATION





Wharfedale  
Naturalists



*Explore, enjoy  
and conserve  
our local wildlife*

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# Welcome

I am really pleased you have picked up a copy of the Wharfedale Naturalists Annual Review 'A Year in Nature, 2023'. I hope you enjoy the read.



It seems strange penning these words in early January; our preparation of the Annual Review starts early. January is not the highlight of the year for most naturalists, but it is a good time to take stock, celebrate the past and look forward to the future. After all, January is named after the Roman god Janus, often depicted as a statue with two heads, one looking backwards, the other looking forwards.

Right at the start, I would like to thank my hard-working co-editor Lucy, and my brother Paul, who has provided invaluable help and guidance with the graphic layout. Thanks must also go to John Stidworthy for all his past hard work and dedication as the Annual Review editor for many years.

I hope you enjoy the new look of the Review. Change can be difficult and often takes us out of our comfort zone. Much like with our new curlew logo, we took an old friend, and gave it a fresh look.

Our membership continues to grow, as does our winter and summer programmes thanks to Helen and Peter. We have organised over 50 events in 2023, excluding the work parties at local nature reserves and on the Denton Estate.

We had some wonderful talks and webinars, with up to 150 members attending. It has been good to welcome members back in person after two years of disruption during the pandemic.

The summer programme was the largest ever. You never know what you might see or who you might meet on our Tuesday evening summer walks, which often rounded off with a visit to a local pub. Bruce's botany trips and David, Nigel and Derek's birding outings remain forever popular. We have added a few new events including geological excursions and mammal tracking. Our new half-day Improve Your Skills events included birdsong at dawn, butterflies, and botany. You will be glad to know we have more new ideas planned for 2024.

We continue to support many local wildlife, conservation and educational projects funded by your membership fees and donations. This has included bringing both local and city-centre school children into the countryside to find out about nature, providing barn owl, pied flycatcher, and swift nest boxes, and long-eared owl nesting baskets. It is an area of charitable

work that I am really pleased to be involved with because a few hundred pounds of funding grants can make an enormous difference to a small project.

Another important part of the society's work celebrated in this journal is the recording of Wharfedale's wildlife, which we have been doing since 1945. This is all down to members' records and the hard work of our Recorders who turn these into their Year in Nature reports that you will find here.

For more active members, the conservation work parties at local nature reserves are a wonderful way to meet fellow naturalists, while helping local wildlife. We have increasingly become involved in the work on the Denton estate, and their plans to rewild, farm regeneratively, and restore peat on Denton Moor. This is all thanks to Nick Bailey, whose wonderful vision I fully endorse. I urge you to get involved if possible.

Likewise, you can read here about the purchase of Weston Woods near Otley, led by Francesca Bridgewater. We are not quite there yet, and fundraising is ongoing.

You can see why I am so enthusiastic about the Wharfedale Naturalists. The environmental news may not be good, but together we can make a real difference locally.

Looking forward to the current year, we will be launching our new website, offering online membership to those that would like a more convenient way to pay. Most of all I am looking forward to meeting more members and enjoying our wonderful Wharfedale wildlife.

Best wishes and a huge thank you to everyone in the Society who make all the above possible.

Finally, I would especially like to thank Peter and Anne Riley for their support since I became President in March last year. Peter enthusiastically led the society for twenty years, and his and Anne's support and guidance have been invaluable to me over the past year.

*Jan*

Ian Brand,  
President, Wharfedale Naturalists



# Officers, Records, Contributors and Acknowledgements

## Officers for 2023

President	Ian Brand
Vice-President	Peter Riley
Secretary	Gordon Haycock
Treasurer	Jeff Davitt
Membership Team	Ros Lilley, Jenny Watson
Summer Programme	Helen Steward
Winter Programme	Peter Riley
Website	Catherine Burton
Charity Commission and Safeguarding	Steve Parkes
Other Committee members	Karen Shackleton, James Tate-Smith

## Recorders

Bees, Wasps, and Ants	Catherine Burton
Birds	Andrew Kelly, Sam Barker (elect)
Botany: Higher Plants, Ferns and Allies	Bruce Brown
Botany (Bryophytes)	Gordon Haycock
Butterflies	Nyree Fearnley, Paul Millard
Dragonflies	David Alred
Fungi	Andy Woodall
Hoverflies	Ken Limb
Moths	Mike and Joyce Clerk
Ladybirds	Anne Riley
Spiders	Stef Pearse
Amphibians and Reptiles	Denis O'Connor
Mammals	Rachel Huxham (elect)
Weather	Peter and Sheila Bancroft

## Annual Review

Editors	Lucy Geddes and Ian Brand
Design	Paul Brand
Front, Back Covers and	
Inside Front Cover Images	Rich Bunce
Inside Back Cover Image	Kelvin Smith

## Nature Notes Contributors

Steve Westerman, Aidan Smith, Anne Clarke, Iain Manfield and Ian Brand

Membership 549 December 2023  
Affiliated to the Yorkshire Naturalists Union  
Member of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust  
Founded 1945  
Registered Charity No 509241

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the success of the society over the past year.  
This includes everyone who has written articles and reports and offered photographs for this review.  
Also thank you to those who led walks, organised events, given talks, and helped at our Tuesday evening meetings.  
You are all much appreciated.

# In Memory

Les Dewdney and Peggy Lambert

## Peggy Lambert 1919-2023

Peggy died in March 2023 aged 103 and was curious about the natural world right up to the end of her long and active life. At the age of well over 102 she would ring me to find out why the gorse seemed to be suffering dieback and about the plight of the native crayfish in the River Aire.



Her deep love of nature goes back to her childhood. Daughter of a gamekeeper in Oxfordshire she was brought up with a country way of life and taught to observe and love nature, their garden providing their daily food. To many people she has passed on her recipes for elderflower and elderberry cordial as well as this love of nature.

Her special love was for plants (she passed Matric at school in botany), both plants in the wild and in her garden. She recently donated in person to The Whartons School in Otley 15 little oak trees she had lovingly grown on after the squirrels planted them in her garden.

Peggy had a deep feeling for Grass Wood where she worked with the working parties after retiring. Her husband's work there was her initial link, and she was always quick to observe special plants like stinking iris growing there.

Those who walked with her in her walking groups appreciated her keen powers of observation.

She is well known to have taught Alan Titchmarsh who described her as "very strict but always fair". She would take her class of young children to the riverside to learn directly about nature.

Peggy belonged to the old school, and we pay tribute to her long life contributing so much and inspiring so many.

Sarah Ward



## Les Dewdney 1923 - 2023

Les Dewdney, a WN stalwart for many years, died on 14th November 2023 just two months after reaching his 100th Birthday.



Les was brought up in Farnham, Surrey. He joined the Army in the War years serving in North Africa and Italy. His future wife Connie was also in the Army, and they met at an Army Camp in Yorkshire. After marriage they settled in Connie's hometown of Ilkley, bringing up three children. They were married for 75 years. Les became a Master Tailor and subsequently joined the Wool Secretariat in Ilkley as the Head Storekeeper.

He joined Wharfedale Naturalists (WN) in 1958 having had an interest in natural history from his boyhood. This interest covered all orders, but birds and mammals were the focus of his attention, and he developed a great expertise in these areas. With regard to birds, he was renowned for his knowledge of bird songs and calls not least because Les, following a detached retina, only had sight in one eye which acted as an encouragement to develop his identification by other means. This ornithological interest extended to bird ringing, and he ran a bird ringing group alongside the river behind Ilkley Graveyard for many years as well as sessions elsewhere in the local area. He was a Bird Recorder for the Society between 1969 and 1983 and again in 1996.

His love of Mammals extended to owning a sheepdog which he would regularly take onto Ilkley Moor to help a local farmer control his sheep. This passion included badgers and foxes, their welfare being a cause of particular concern for him.

Les was never able to drive, and this meant that he concentrated his natural history interest in Ilkley and the surrounding area, submitting copious records of his sightings to WN every year.

Les was very artistic which manifested itself in a number of ways including artwork, not least for the WN Annual Reviews (or Transactions as the publication used to be known), and the making of Shepherds' Crooks for which he became renowned in the local area.

Les served on the WN Committee for many years becoming President in 1973/74 and 1977/78. Such was his overall contribution that he was made an Honorary Life Member of WN, a recognition that has only been awarded to a very select few. Les was renowned for his friendly disposition with all who came into contact with him, and he was especially adept at welcoming new members and making them feel very much at home. He played a significant role in the Children's Section which ran for several years through the sixties and seventies.

In summary Les was a shining example of a Society member with an extensive natural history knowledge and enthusiasm, who made a lasting impression on all who met him, thereby helping to produce the thriving organisation we know today.

Peter Riley

# Fifty Events That Made Our Year in Nature, 2023



Credit: Kelvin Smith



Credit: Ian Brand

## Tuesday Evening Walks

These walks are a Wharfedale Naturalists institution. You never know what you might see as we explore our local countryside, and with experts to hand to explain what we find, there is never a dull moment. Evening walks are a friendly and sociable introduction to the natural world, often with the chance for a beer or coffee afterwards in a local pub.



Credit: Ian Brand

2nd May	<b>Barden and Strid Wood</b> Ros Lilley
9th May	<b>Heber's Ghyll</b> Karen Shackleton
23rd May	<b>Botany, Beer and Banter, Burley Tree Walk</b> Bruce Brown
6th June	<b>Fewston Reservoir</b> Peter and Anne Riley
13th June	<b>High Royds, Menston</b> Andrew Kelly
20th June	<b>Fungi, Beer and Banter, Calverley Woods</b> Andy Woodall
4th July	<b>Botany, Beer and Banter, Burley Moor</b> Ian Brand



## Birding

Whether a beginner, improver, or expert, you are in safe hands with our bird experts David, Nigel and Derek. They pass on their enthusiasm and knowledge about our local birdlife with outings to birding hotspots both near and far.



Credit: Kelvin Smith

19th January	<b>Grimwith Reservoir</b> , Nigel Steels
11th February	<b>Staveley YWT Reserve</b> , David Smith
23rd March	<b>Bempton Cliffs RSPB</b> , Nigel Steels
6th May	<b>Staveley YWT Reserve</b> , David Smith
20th May	<b>Timble Ings</b> , Derek Parkin
15th June	<b>Bempton Cliffs RSPB</b> , Nigel Steels
2nd September	<b>Pennythorn Hill, Baildon</b> , Derek Parkin
21st September	<b>Fairburn Ings RSPB</b> , Nigel Steels
21st October	<b>Staveley YWT Reserve</b> , David Smith
18th November	<b>Nosterfield Reserve</b> , David Smith
2nd December	<b>Ripon City Wetlands</b> , David Smith

## Botany

Our botany recorder Bruce organises a fantastic series of spring and summer trips. We visit some amazing places throughout Wharfedale, frequently off the beaten track.



Credit: Jane Robinson



20th April	<b>Denton Hall Estate</b> Sue Stevens
4th May	<b>Hazlewood and Kex Beck</b> Heather Burrow and Sarah Ward
11th May	<b>Bolton Abbey Estate</b> Mark Jeffery
25th May	<b>Kilnsey Park</b> Nicky Vernon and Bruce Brown
8th June	<b>Ilkley Moor</b> Bruce Brown
15th June	<b>Bogridge Farm, Huby</b> Bruce Brown
13th July	<b>Weybecks Pasture, Kilnsey</b> Bruce Brown
27th July	<b>Arncliffe</b> Bruce Brown
10th August	<b>Malham</b> Bruce Brown



## Improve Your Skills

These are an exciting new addition to our programme. Usually just two hours long and at weekends, they are an excellent way to dip your toe into something you always fancied knowing a little bit more about.



7th May	<b>Butterflies, Stainburn Forest</b> Nyree Fearnley
14th May	<b>Birdsong, Dawn Chorus, Ilkley</b> Helen Steward
20th May	<b>Botany, Addingham</b> Ian Brand
5th August	<b>Butterflies, Sun Lane, Burley</b> Nyree Fearnley



## Special Events

These highly varied events are a fantastic mixture, all well worth attending. Like improving your skills, it is good to see the introduction of new events such as geology excursions and mammal tracking, which we hope to continue.



14th January	<b>Winter Walk, Fewston</b> Peter and Anne Riley
30th May	<b>Butterflies in South Cumbria</b> Chris Winnick
10th June	<b>Birds of Ilkley Moor</b> Tracy Gray
8th July	<b>Butterfly walk, Threshfield</b> Nyree Fearnley
11th July	<b>Rodley Nature Reserve</b> Peter and Barbara Murphy
15th July	<b>The Geology of Crummackdale</b> Rob Knipe and Nick Shaw
8th October	<b>Fungal Foray, Swinsty</b> Andy Woodall
26th November	<b>Mammal Tracking, Barden</b> Rachel Huxham





## Tuesday Evening Autumn and Winter Talks

Just like the summer evening walks, these autumn and winter talks are another popular series of events. It is really something special to come along to a live talk, and we have had excellent speakers over the past twelve months. A real buzz has developed this winter with up to 150 members attending each event.

10th January	<b>Washburn Valley Birds as a Barometer of Environmental Change</b> Peter Riley	26th September	<b>Scandinavian Alpine Plants</b> Professor John Birks
24th January	<b>Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust</b> Richard Hore and Mike Appleton	10th October	<b>The English Chalk Steam</b> Doug Kennedy
14th February	<b>Saving the Planet Addingham style</b> Professor Rick Battarbee	24th October	<b>Brimham Rocks</b> Stephen Lewis
28th February	<b>Saving Wetlands for Wildlife and People</b> Jackie Harris	14th November	<b>Marine Fauna of the UK</b> Jack Lucas
14th March	<b>Recorders Evening</b>	28th November	<b>The Work of the Yorkshire Rewilding Network</b> Jeff Davitt
28th March	<b>AGM and Rhino Conservation in Zululand</b> Diana Penny	12th December	<b>Why I Love Bugs</b> Anne Riley

## Conservation Work Parties on Local Nature Reserves and Denton Estate



# Supported Projects

Although we are a small charity, we use our funds from membership, donations and legacies to support numerous local wildlife, conservation and education projects. Grants can be from a few hundred pounds upwards, each of which makes an enormous difference to local initiatives. This is something of which we are rightly proud.

## In recent years we have supported

- I-Wharfe Citizen Science project, throughout Wharfedale examining water quality and freshwater ecology.
- Tree planting, Upper Wharfedale, National Trust
- Preliminary survey for potential Beaver introduction at Denton
- Community tree nursery, Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust
- Yorkshire Rewilding Network collaborative project with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

## Grants made during 2023 include

- **Friends of Weston Wood**  
Donation towards purchase
- **Grass Wood Nature Reserve**  
Conservation equipment  
Tawny and Little Owl nest boxes
- **Hebden Environmental Action Team**  
Swift nest boxes
- **Wildlife Friendly Otley**  
Sponsorship of outdoor wildlife education for local and city-centre children  
Wildflower seed and bulbs  
Sponsorship of Children's wildlife author visit as part of WFO festival
- **Wharfedale Birding and Raptor Group**  
Long-eared Owl nest baskets  
Spotted Flycatcher nest boxes
- **Addingham Environmental Group**  
Hedging and Trees
- **Wharfedale Barn Owl Group**  
Barn Owl nest boxes
- **Otley Swift Watch**  
Swift Boxes
- **Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits nature reserve**  
Conservation equipment



### 1-3 Wharfedale Barn Owl Project

Credit: Stuart Barlow

### 4-5 Long-eared Owl Nest Baskets

Credit: Andy Jowett

### 6 Hebden Swift Project

Credit: Ros Lilley

### 7-8 I-Wharfe Project

Credit: Professor Battarbee/ Addingham Environmental Group





10th January

# Washburn Valley Birds as Barometer of Environmental Change

Peter Riley

Reviewed by Alison Roberts

Peter delivered an informative and lively account of observations of the bird population in 3 areas of the Washburn Valley over his 25 years of walking in the area.

**Peter delivered an informative and lively account of observations of the bird population in 3 areas of the Washburn Valley over his 25 years of walking in the area.**

Helpfully, the British Trust for Ornithology have conducted breeding bird surveys from 1995 which has enabled Peter to compare his observations in Yorkshire with the national picture.

The Washburn Valley consists of a mixture of ancient woodland, reservoir, river and meadows. Areas of historic wetland have since been drained, with a consequent loss of Snipe, Curlew, Lapwing and Redshank.

So, what's happening?

Blackcap numbers have increased by 100% and spotted flycatchers have decreased by 95%. They are both insectivores, but the latter feed on flying insects which have declined hugely.

Fewer willow warblers are seen in England, compared to Scotland, possibly due to our changing climate. Whilst chiffchaffs are increasing, swallow and skylark numbers are down.

The UK hosts 45 million pheasants, which are omnivorous feeders, competing for food with other birds. Crows consume pheasant roadkill and are also increasing, by 30% nationally and 60% in Yorkshire.

Jackdaws are increasing and ousting little owls from tree holes. Canada and Greylag Geese numbers have increased massively, greylags by a massive 3000%. Greylag young are insectivores, depleting the supply for smaller birds.

Yorkshire Water's provision of fish for anglers have helped to increase Cormorant numbers. However, Little Egrets are observed occasionally.

Many bird species are declining, including the Heron, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew (nationally, although stable in Yorkshire), Lapwing, Pied Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, House Sparrow, Starling, Greenfinch, Marsh Tit and Linnet.

Tree Sparrow, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Buzzard, Red Kite, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit and Long Tailed Tit are increasing.

So, the Washburn Valley birds show a mixed picture of our changing climate, but as Peter was very keen to emphasise, there are positives to be found.



# Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust Supporting People, Landscape and Wildlife

Richard Hore and Mike Appleton

Reviewed by Polly Hosking



A small charity doing big things with people, the landscape and the wildlife of the Yorkshire Dales. This is how the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust describes itself and throughout their talk, Richard and Mike illustrated how it does just that.

The Trust's emphasis is on connection, giving people who live, work or visit the Dales a sense of belonging. In turn, they will have more understanding of the Dales and want to protect it. By working with small, localised projects and with communities within the Dales and in the inner cities, the Trust brings people and nature together. Examples of the Trust's projects include restoring hay meadows for biodiversity and pollinators, supporting and planting local broadleaf tree saplings, recycling the plastic tubes used to protect tree saplings and running courses for woodland crafts. They all help the environment and the individual's sense of well being.

The charity receives funding from a variety of sources which it uses to award community grants ranging from £250 - £5,000. The Wharfedale Naturalists Society has been a long-standing donor, giving £6,000 to date. Our latest donation has funded a sapling planting project in Malham. We were all asked to spread the word and continue engage with the projects.

Richard and Mike presented many facts alongside anecdotes and case histories. Using the chat function for the online quiz tested participants' confidence with technology but also their bird knowledge, using sightings from the Long Preston Floodplain, a location championed by the charity.



Credit: Addingham Environmental Group

14<sup>th</sup> February

# Saving the Planet Addingham Style and Wastewater in the Wharfe An Update

Professor Rick Battarbee

Reviewed by Georgina Flynn

Professor Paul Batterbee gave an inspiring two-part talk. He reminded us of the global warming crisis, and questioned whether the western lifestyle enjoyed by many is sustainable. Locally we see increasing storms and biodiversity losses.

Addingham Environment Group was set up in 2016 to raise awareness of the environmental challenges, help residents reduce their carbon footprint and waste, protect wildlife and to manage water wisely. The group now has 300 members, 100 active volunteers, and a 'saplings' group for children. News articles and letters, social media and a yearly environment weekend help with awareness and engagement.

Rick detailed the great work of the Addingham Environment Group, planting trees and hedges,

eradicating and controlling invasive species, building ponds and wetlands and improving wildflower populations. The aim is to make a mosaic of habitats. He acknowledged the significant role of the volunteers in making these projects a success.

In the second part of his talk, Rick explained how public anger at the amount of raw sewage released into the Wharfe led to the formation of the Ilkley Clean River Group in 2018. The popular Cromwell site was granted Bathing Water Status in 2020, which ensures regular monitoring by the Environment Agency. Bathing at this location is currently not advised as water quality is poor. Untreated effluent from human and agricultural sources pours into the river during high rainfall and storms, causing

peak concentrations of bacteria. Interestingly, treated effluent currently causes more ecological damage because it flows continuously and has a high nutrient content, particularly phosphate.

Eutrophication is the most common cause of rivers failing standards and diatom algae are a good ecological indicator of changes. A citizen science project, iWharfe, has found that the primary source of pollution of the whole river is Ilkley. There are solutions: Ilkley sewage works needs tertiary treatment, and better management of waterways, drainage, and agricultural land next to rivers. He added, however, that the Wharfe is still in better condition than most other rivers.



28th February

# Saving Wetlands for Wildlife and for People

The story of amazing species and how WWT works to protect them and the habitats they depend on

Jackie Harris

Reviewed by Phil Batman



Credit: WWT Slimbridge

Set up by Sir Peter Scott over 76 years ago, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust is best known for its 10 visitor sites. The Trust's early ambition was to preserve species, but it now has an international reputation for its conservation work.

Jackie's talk focussed on 4 endangered species: Bewick's swan, Madagascar pochard, broad-billed sandpiper and Eurasian curlew.

Bewick's swans have distinctive black and yellow bills. Peter Scott learned to identify these swans by their facial appearance, enabling the WWT to reveal family trees. This showed that teenage swans stick around their parents, who are faithful to their partners. At three months, cygnets fly back from Russia to Slimbridge Wetland Centre,

where they are ringed and their facial patterns photographed. Unfortunately, Bewick's swan numbers have declined by 30% in 30 years, due to landscape alterations, hunting and avian influenza.

In her 'electric paramotor,' Sacha Dent has followed the Slimbridge flock, establishing that the swans have followed the same flight path for years. Alas humans have changed the landscape such that the swans are threatened by things like power lines. Sacha has discouraged this by mounting 'flickers' on them, although the work is currently on hold in Russia. Russian hunters shoot the swans for food, which is in breach of international law. Although the recent avian influenza outbreaks have obliterated some species and Bewick's swans do catch it, there is

'I have never worked before in a place with such a powerful belief ...

hope that they are less susceptible to the virus.

The island of Madagascar is heavily populated. In the 1960s and 1970s the Madagascar pochard was abundant but by 1991 it seemed the species had become extinct. However, in 2006, a pochard was spotted in a lake in a volcanic crater. Subsequently 5 or 6 females and 12 to 18 males were identified, but the ducklings did not survive because the topology of the lake had changed. In 2008, 6 eggs were found, and the ducklings raised. This resulted in a breeding programme on a different lake which has had promising results.

There are also WWT programmes to halt the decline of Eurasian curlew and the highly endangered broad-billed sandpiper.



Credit: Manyoni Nature Reserve, Zululand Conservation Trust

28th March

# Rhino Conservation in Zululand

## The Horns of a Dilemma

Diana Penny

Reviewed by Peta Constable

What is worse than a dehorned rhino? Answer: a dead rhino, its horn harvested to meet the ever-increasing demands of the South Asian markets. Born of a false belief in the medicinal properties of powdered rhino horn, since 2014 there has been in a surge in poaching in Zululand, resulting in the current endangered status of both black and white rhinos.

Diana's talk covered three main areas: the founding of Manyoni Private Game Reserve in Zululand, South Africa, the decision to dehorn all the rhinos and the involvement of the local community.

In 2004, 17 dedicated landowners dropped their fences to create one continuous protected area which became a potential release site for the WWF Black Rhino Expansion Project the following year. Today, although the reserve is home to many of South Africa's iconic animals, conservation of both black and white rhino is the driving force. Each reserve member pays into the management and staff costs of the reserve and is responsible for costs of maintaining their own land.

In 2015, after much deliberation, the decision was taken to dehorn all the rhinos on the Reserve. Happily, dehorning does not impact negatively on rhino lifestyle and has led to a significant decrease in poaching.

At \$600 per rhino, dehorning is an expensive exercise, potentially dangerous to both man and beast. Diana showed us in fascinating detail the dehorning process, the steps taken to protect and reassure these sensitive beasts and the safety measures in place for the humans.

She spoke also of the steps to train and employ people from the local, impoverished, community. Two local people are now rhino monitors and many now are employed on the reserve, working as part of the anti-poaching unit, looking after wildlife, or employed in domestic roles by individual landowners. This spreads the understanding of the benefits of eco-tourism to the area.

Diana finished with a charming photo of a baby rhino from the reserve orphanage being 'nannied' by a billy goat, which stands protectively on the recumbent baby rhino.



26th September

# Scandinavian Alpine Plants

Professor John Birks

Reviewed by Alison Roberts

Credit: Professor John Birks



John Birks is Emeritus Professor of Biology at the University of Bergen and a visiting professor at University College London. John studied Botany at Cambridge University, followed by research into vegetation and environmental history over the past 10-20,000 years in Finland, Scandinavia, the UK, Minnesota, the Yukon, Siberia and Tibet.

John's illustrated talk described the plants of West and Central Norway, North Scandinavia and Svalbard. The photographs taken by John and his wife and represent a lifetime of research and travel. There are 2,750 species of alpine plant in Scandinavia, Denmark and Svalbard. Many species are also found in other parts of the world, including the UK, but often in localised areas which do not necessarily have similar physical conditions.

Conditions above or below the treeline affect growing conditions, determining which plant species may be found. Mountain summits consist of rock which is snow covered for many months. Conditions are harsh but plants have evolved to survive and flower during the short summer.

Abisko National Park in Sweden is a botanical mecca with dry and sunny conditions, enabling alpine plants to thrive. The limestone and circulating ground water fosters rare plants such as mountain avens and Lapland rosebay.

The archipelago of Svalbard is between Norway and the Arctic, with Spitsbergen being the main island. It hosts 165 plant species existing under marginal conditions of mountain and water. Herbs, grasses, sedges, creeping dwarf, shrubs, ferns, mosses and lichens all grow here.

And climate change? Glaciers are receding rapidly. Studies of alpine plant life have revealed a mixed picture. At lower levels, the number of species is increasing but little change is seen at higher levels.

# The English Chalk Stream

A rare phenomenon under threat

Doug Kennedy

Reviewed by Peta Constable

Chalk streams are things of great beauty and of huge ecological importance. They are also rare and under threat. Globally there are only 260 true chalk streams (though some flow temporarily in a cyclical way) and an amazing 224 of these are in England.



Credit: Doug Kennedy

It is no wonder that people like Doug Kennedy are passionate about studying and advocating for their protection and survival. Chalk streams occur from the Yorkshire Wolds, with the Gypsy Race being the most northerly on the globe, to the South Downs and Somerset. Doug's area of special interest is his home area of the Chilterns.

So, what are the characteristics of chalk streams? Clear, fast flowing water, shallow, gravelly beds, with the water filtering through chalk to produce slightly alkaline pH. These conditions support a rich and specialist ecology with the River Itchen being one of the best trout fishing rivers in England. Chalk streams support a huge variety of life, including otters, trout, water plants such as cresses and water crowfoot and a plethora of the invertebrate life.

But chalk streams are at risk. Why? Abstraction of water for industry and agriculture, high public water consumption, pollution from agricultural and business run-off, sewage releases and climate change. In addition, flow can be disrupted or changed when landowners construct weirs and dams, and government builds roads and railways alongside or across chalk streams.

Are there solutions? Yes, but all are expensive, some unpopular and difficult to enforce. We could reduce abstraction from chalk stream and invest in water superstructures (e.g. improved sewage systems, water transference, metering, reducing wastage). We also need stable aquifer levels, to decrease public water consumption, reducing system leakage and improve the water supply network to get water to where it is needed. Importantly, we need to put pressure on water companies, government and local agencies to act.

It would be tragic to lose or to seriously compromise such a national treasure.

Cf: entries on the Net: e.g. dealing with Gypsy Race An Environment Agency blog of 21.09.23 from Amanda Foster 'Working to Improve Globally Rare Habitat', Environment Agency Yorkshire and North East.

University of Cambridge: Saving England's Chalk Streams by Tom Almeroth-Williams



# Charismatic Marine Megafauna of the UK

Jack Lucas

Reviewed by Phil Batman



Credit: Jack Lucas

Jack Lucas provided us with a highly informative talk on seabirds, mammals, and fish. Seabirds differ from terrestrial birds in many respects, with a longer lifespan of up to 60 years, delayed breeding by up to 10 years and usually just lay one egg per year. Gannets can plunge dive from over 40m, hitting the water at 100 kph. Their neck muscles lock vertebrae on breaking the surface and their air sacs act like air bags.

Fulmar can locate prey from a huge distance. Their chicks can protect themselves by projecting a special vomit containing an incapacitating material with feather-matting properties. Puffins' beaks have a variety of purposes, the rough tongue clamping prey to the roof of the mouth. Puffins live out at sea for months, only coming ashore to breed. Manx shearwater, whose chicks leave the nest one-third heavier than their parents, have excellent night vision which allows them to fly into the burrow after dark. Gulls have a hinged bill excellent for consuming large items and stand on one leg so that veins and arteries cross in a heat exchange mechanism.

Marine mammals are hugely popular yet understudied, spending most of their life hidden

from view. The fast metabolism of harbour porpoises obliges them to feed continuously day and night and they are preyed by many other mammals. Orcas vocalise with different dialects so that "two different killer whales from different parts of the world wouldn't understand each other!"

Bottlenose dolphins seek out interactions with humans, often approaching vessels and "they seem to want you there." However, they are also aggressive and practise infanticide. Sperm whales spend much of their lives in total darkness. They use clicks analogous to Morse code for communicating and navigating. Basking sharks swim on autopilot so use little energy. Their life cycle is hugely mysterious.



Credit: Ian Brand







24th October

# Brimham Rocks

a 500 million year story

Stephen Lewis

Reviewed by Huw Roberts

A well-attended evening at Christchurch was rewarded with a fascinating and well-illustrated talk on the famous Yorkshire attraction, Brimham Rocks.

Stephen led us through complex geology and 500 million years to bring an oversight of how the formation occurred and why they have fascinated generations of Yorkshire people and visitors.

The story started 500 million years ago when the area that would become Europe and Britain was part of a super-continent south of the equator. With the passage of eons of time and continental drift there was a movement northwards. The monumental forces involved pushed up an enormous range of mountains. These were perhaps 400 miles from Nidderdale extending into what is now Scandinavia.

The actions of erosive forces on these peaks along with high levels of water washing away the sediment, depositing sand and grit many miles downstream. Complex 'braided rivers' covered the land producing waves of deposits with a characteristic form clearly visible at Brimham today. Monumental earthquakes modified the course of these rivers and large splits in the rocks became visible.

Once again, time and immense pressures produced what we now call millstone grit and formed the rocks we see today. These structures are called 'tors' and were produced by erosive forces while still underground and covered in soil. Once exposed, the actions of ice, water

and wind-blown dust and grit have slowly sandblasted the tors and produced the fantastic shapes Brimham Rocks is famous for.

Tourism began around 1750 when the formations became a popular attraction as part of a Grand Tour, with guidebooks and the building of a visitor centre, which is still in use today. The Victorians gave the formations names and given the amazing shapes of the rocks, they speculated that they were carved by druids! After successive owners, the site has now become one of the most visited outdoor attractions of the National Trust and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Trust aims to preserve and enhance the site despite the pressures of visitor numbers. A team of volunteers help to prevent an overgrowth of birch and rowan saplings and improve the flora and fauna.

Following a social break, the evening finished with an excellent photographic essay showing the formations in all different weathers, various seasons, and atmospheric moods.



# Yorkshire Rewilding Network

28th November

## Rewilding in Yorkshire and the work of the Yorkshire Rewilding Network

Jeff Davitt

Reviewed by Polly Hosking

On a cold November evening when there did not seem much to feel hopeful about across the world, Jeff Davitt gave the Wharfedale Naturalist Society a truly inspirational talk. He explained that conserving nature is not enough. We can aim for so much more. If we let it, nature can rebound and by taking action, we can facilitate the re-establishment of healthy functioning ecosystems.

Using the examples of other rewilding schemes such as the Knepp estate in Sussex, Jeff explained the processes by which large herbivores can affect their habitat by both disturbance and dispersal. The absence of pesticides ensures animal dung has a positive effect on insects. Leaving trees and vegetation to decay naturally releases nutrients for new growth. These practices encourage biodiversity in the flora and the fauna. Rewilding is not abandoning the land, but nature taking the lead. Jeff is aware of the need for dialogue as some find the idea of rewilding contrary to their beliefs and cultural heritage.

Jeff then concentrated on the benefits and the successes of rewilding projects in Yorkshire. The reintroduction of beavers near Pickering has created, “a three-dimensional life abundant ecosystem” of birds, animals and flora. By slowing the flow of the stream, they have reduced the risks of flooding downstream.

A powerful illustration of the landscape in the Dales showed how it could look if rewilding practices were implemented, with a greater variety of species (some reintroduced), trees moving up the hillside and more diverse farms.

Rewilding in Yorkshire is a spectrum, from the window box to the big landowner, and we were encouraged to take part ourselves. Jeff showed pictures from his own garden illustrating the benefits of establishing wildflower areas, reduced mowing and avoiding pesticides.

Jeff is a founding member of the Yorkshire Rewilding Network. Launched in August 2020, it is a charity which aims to bring together people who have an interest in rewilding. Membership is free and inclusive, a charity bringing hope to Yorkshire.





12th December

# Why I Love Bugs

Anne Riley

Reviewed by Alison Roberts

Credit: Anne Riley

Anne's talks are reliably engaging, entertaining, packed with fascinating information and accompanied by the most amazing photographs.

Anne chose the term 'bugs' as it covers a wider group of creepy crawlies. Insects are a small animal with 6 legs, usually 2 pairs of wings, a three-part body and an exoskeleton. Bees, wasps and ants are insects but centipedes, millipedes, wood lice are not. All could be called bugs.

Why are insects so successful? They are small so do not need much space, they have a protective cuticle and an efficient nervous system. Insects can fly which helps them to locate food and escape from predators. They also have a high reproductive rate.

The survival of insects is vital for the rest of life on our planet to continue, primarily because of their role as pollinators. Three-quarters of flowering plants depend on insects for pollination. Bees are the most well-known pollinators but any insect that is attracted to flowers may inadvertently pollinate other plants on its travels. Insects also help recycle waste organic material and are food for other animals.

Beetles are the largest order of insects making up about 40% of all insect species so far described. 1 in 3 animal or plant species is a beetle.

While in Rio Cristalino reserve in Brazil, Anne photographed a harlequin beetle on a tree trunk. After nightfall and on the same tree Anne noticed a moth emerging from its pupa. It was a white witch (one of the largest moths in the world). Anne got her dinner and settled down with food next to the tree to watch as much of the emergence as possible. A true lover of bugs!

# Wildlife Friendly Otley Nature in Schools

Neil Griffin

1970, Mrs Lewis's class, Abbey Road Juniors in Darlington: this is where I was first bitten by the bug. We did a topic on 'Birds.' David Armin and I attached a piece of green carpet to an old clothes horse and glued on some leaves, proudly took our new hide on to the playing field and began a lifetime hobby.

As Wildlife Friendly Otley's (WFO) education officer, I aim to engage local children with nature, hopefully inspiring a passion in some, but giving all an awareness of the wealth of wildlife we are lucky enough to live amongst, and a sense of their place in it. It's so important for children to experience nature in local green spaces, including their school grounds, and they innately enjoy being outdoors in a natural environment like a wood or a meadow. Mind you, I also tell them they might see the fastest creature in the world whilst shopping in Leeds (the peregrine). We all now know, and scientific studies have proved, that immersion in nature is good for both our physical and mental health, and we need ways to regularly get children away from the various exciting screens that can dominate their lives these days. With their natural curiosity they can learn about and understand nature in a hands-on way. Studies also show that nature-based learning improves a child's critical thinking and academic performance.

WFO's school wildlife days have three broad aims: to connect children and staff with nature, to make them aware of the problems faced by the natural world, and to empower them to do something about those problems. My experience as a classroom teacher for 26 years, followed by training by the RSPB and TCV, has enabled me to develop a variety of methods to achieve those goals. These include classroom and assembly discussions, practical investigations (e.g. minibeast hunts, pond-dips), educational games, and school grounds wildlife 'make-overs' (e.g. planting trees, making bird feeders).

Obviously, the children come from a lot of different starting points, even in Otley. Some come armed with a bird book and grandad's binoculars; others have been given the sense that the outdoors is dirty and dangerous and can't even identify a nettle. But nearly all children

love getting out there and exploring the natural environment. It has been an absolute joy for me to work with Nursery and Reception classes for the first time, their awe and wonder at nature is wonderful to see and easy to nourish. For them, I categorise the strengths and weaknesses of local wildlife as 'happy stories' (e.g. the return of the red kites) and 'sad stories' (e.g. the plight of hedgehogs). At the other end of the scale there is Prince Henry's Grammar School, with its brilliant 'Ecommittee' of students from across the age range, all bursting with ideas to help make their school and town more wildlife friendly.

The schools themselves vary greatly: from Pool in Wharfedale with its wood and large pond, to Westgate Primary School's urban setting, but the latter illustrates what can be done from a modest starting point. The Headteacher at Westgate is passionate about green issues, and amongst other things we have created a sensory garden, put up swift boxes, and enjoyed the visit of a nature author, funded by the Wharfedale Naturalists Society (WNS). Our next project at Westgate is to monitor their resident bats.

It's a privilege to work with all these young people, and they inspire me. They are well-informed about the climate emergency, and to a lesser extent the biodiversity crisis, and I emphasise to them how crucial aspects of various ecosystems are to our survival as a species. Contrary to lazy stereotypes, they bring passion, energy and ideas.

We really appreciate the financial (and other) support WNS has given WFO with these projects, and with some further afield, such as engaging city children with nature (Greengates Primary, Bradford and Bramley Park Academy, Leeds).

## Contact

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All images. Credit: Neil Griffin







# Long-tailed Tits Nest

Data from the BTO  
Anne Riley

We were delighted when a pair of Long-tailed Tits started spending a lot of time in the garden in February – could they be looking for a suitable nest site?

By March they were regularly visiting the Gorse bush at the back of the pond in the back garden – clearly visible from the lounge windows, and even better from the conservatory.

We didn't dare approach closely outside for fear of alerting the attention of magpies, but when we saw them collecting bits of spider silk and moss, we knew they really were building a nest – and what a good place amongst the thorns of the Gorse bush which is bordered by a thick hedge.

Long-tailed Tit nests are built using moss, spider silk and egg cocoons (of which we have plenty round the window frames!), lichen and then finally feathers for the lining. The feathers may be picked up from the ground or collected from dead birds – a good example of recycling! The nest can take up to 4 weeks to build and the slower the better since rushed nests built later in the season tend to be not as strong or well made and rarely succeed. Feathering the nest (the lining) is the last job, and around two thousand feathers may be used. The Victorian ornithologist William McGillivray dissected one and counted 2,379!!

The moss gives structural integrity and waterproofing and the silk and lichen enable it to 'catch' on surrounding vegetation to hold it in place in the wind and rain. The dome-shaped structure is flexible and expandable to accommodate the growing brood.

Our long-tails (both male and female) worked through March diligently collecting the various components, and as we later found weaving them into an exquisite nest. Then at the beginning of April they vanished. Panic!! Had one of them been got by a magpie or cat?

Much to our relief, after a week or so they reappeared. Apparently, it's quite common for the adults to do this when the nest is complete – maybe to check if any predators have spotted it. Only around 20% of nests actually survive to fledging, so the odds are heavily stacked against a successful outcome.

Soon after they returned the behaviour suggested she was sitting on eggs – usually 8-12 eggs are laid, each one weighing around 0.9g. Only the female incubates the eggs (for two-and-a-bit weeks). When she did come out to feed, she had a very curly tail!

We're not sure when the eggs hatched, but the adults were definitely feeding by the end of April. They were very careful to enter the hedge away from the Gorse bush, but then very briefly we might catch sight of a head as he or she entered the nest. Fledging is 15 – 18 days after hatching, but we went away on 10<sup>th</sup> May and they were still feeding fairly frantically.

When we returned on 19<sup>th</sup> May, all was quiet. Not a sign. On 21<sup>st</sup> May, Peter dared to approach the nest and cautiously feel inside – nothing but feathers! What did it mean – no sign of damage to the nest, so had they got out safely? Would we ever know?

That very afternoon we were sitting having a cup of coffee on the back seat under the plum tree when I heard a little 'tweet', and there was a little baby longtail with its pink eyes! Then more tweeting as one after another landed in the tree – I think I could count eight. Then the parents arrived too as if to say 'we just wanted to let you know we all made it!!'

The young stay under supervision for the rest of the breeding season. A second brood is very unlikely and indeed the family may help other couples who started later – this is known as co-operative breeding and may help keep the local population healthy.

It's possible that they may return next year, but they never reuse an old nest – just as well, since it's now residing safely in our garage so we can share this little marvel of nature with others.

All images. Credit: Anne Riley





First clutches laid	8 April (24 March - 29 April)
Number of broods	1
Egg size	14x11mm. Weight: 0.9g (of which 6% is shell)
Clutch size	6-8 eggs 7.06±1.93 (2-4) N=1095
Incubation period	15-18 days 16.16±1.78 (13-18.5) N=1095 By female
Fledging period	15.5-16.5days 15.71±0.97 (14-17) N=849 As altricial, naked
Maximum age from ringing	8 years 11 months 0 days (set in 2014)
Typical lifespan	2 years with breeding typically at 1 year
Adult survival	0.443±0.044
Juvenile survival	0.251 (in first year)





Credit: Francesca Bridgewater







# Purchasing a Wood for Nature and the Community, or 'How to buy a Wood'

Francesca Bridgewater

Weston Woods (aka East Wood, Weston), east of Otley, is a mixed deciduous woodland home to red kites, goldcrests, tree creepers, warblers, woodpeckers and tawny owls, boasting mature oak, birch, beech and sycamore with a riot of bluebells and wild garlic in Spring. When it came up for sale in February 2023 there was a flurry of excitement locally, with various groups including Wharfedale Naturalists, Otley2023, Wildlife Friendly Otley, Climate Action Ilkley, Addingham Environment Group and Menston Area Nature Trust (MANT) wondering if it would be possible to buy it, to save it for wildlife and for the community, in perpetuity. This initial excitement was rapidly followed by a slump of despondency, as the reality of raising an unknown amount of money (as the sale was via sealed bids) within a very short timescale (just over two weeks), kicked in. But nothing ventured, nothing gained, so a Zoom meeting of the above groups was hastily convened. Fortunately MANT, a small environmental charity, had been recently set up for exactly this purpose, to buy land for nature and the community, so could become the body to legally own the land. Equally fortuitously, the group contained a wide range of skills and contacts and were able to mobilise much goodwill.

The subsequent crowdfunder raised over an amazing £130,000 with at least £30,000 of gift aid. An incredible response from over 1500 donors, locally and as far away as Australia. This was fantastic – but there were three problems: all the other bidders could see how much we had raised, so could outbid us; we didn't think that we had raised enough to win the bidding; on top of the sale price the vendors were charging VAT which we couldn't avoid. In stepped the wonderful philanthropist, Julia Davies of 'We Have the Power' [www.wehavethepower.org](http://www.wehavethepower.org). Seeing how much we had raised, she agreed to lend us up to £100,000 to raise our bid and secure the woods. With this secret weapon in our armoury, we were able to put in a substantial bid of £247,860 inclusive of VAT, and the vendors accepted it.

Perhaps fortunately for us, the legal processes took a while, and by the time we completed the purchase in early December we had

managed to raise more money, through further crowdfunding, stalls at events, sponsoring 3x3m squares in the woods, and a hugely generous donation from partners of Hg Capital of £29,000, reducing the remaining loan needed to £29,000. We now have two years to repay the loan.

Now the real work begins! We have set up a body under Friends of Weston Woods, who will manage the Woods. The first task is to undertake a full ecological survey – we have already had a baseline botanical survey kindly done by Bruce Brown. Once we know what different habitats and species we have, we can start drawing up a plan to improve the variety of habitats and quantity of biodiversity and allow nature to lead the way to an enriched woodland. Our dream is to be part of a linked wildlife corridor along Wharfedale with abundant biodiversity. We will also have structural issues to address; the stone walls all need rebuilding, and the local branch of

the Dry-Stone Walling Association have offered to help. However, many plans apart from safety requirements, will have to wait until the loan is repaid.

We have been making links with local schools and youth organizations, and many community groups to find out how the woods can benefit them, and vice versa. We want to promote the woods as a fantastic place to spend time in nature and we hope many people will visit and take away a sense of peace and awe.

If anyone would like to be kept informed about Weston Woods or get involved in any working parties, please sign up to the free mailing list at [www.tinyurl.com/fowwsunsubscribe](http://www.tinyurl.com/fowwsunsubscribe). Alternatively, or in addition, you can join Menston Area Nature Trust for £5pa at [www.mant.org.uk](http://www.mant.org.uk) where you can find more out about Weston Woods, and please support any fundraising initiatives to help us repay the loan.





# Environmental Change in the Washburn Valley

Peter Riley

I was lucky enough to be able to retire early from my career with British Gas. For the last six years of my career, I worked in the Midlands travelling home to Burley for the weekends. This severely restricted the opportunity to further my interest in natural history so the option of early retirement at the end of 1996 was a chance not to be missed.

From the outset I wanted to indulge my enjoyment of walking in the Washburn Valley so I worked out a set of 3 walks (around 13-16 miles) which would help keep me fit and give me the opportunity to generally enjoy the wildlife but more specifically monitor developments within the bird populations in the valley. Little did I know that I would still be doing these walks after 27 years – and I have now done over 700! As you may conclude from this, the enjoyment has not diminished.

However, what has diminished, without any doubt, is the birdlife and this applies to both the number of species seen on the walk and the number of birds. In asserting this it is in a

sense reassuring to note that the trends I have observed are consistent with national surveys such as the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey.

However, the trends are not all bad news as birds such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Little Egret have significantly increased – but even this 'good' news has a sting in the tail namely climate change. It has long been clear that the spread of Egret species to the UK is linked to warmer temperatures whilst migrants such as Warblers do not need to travel as far to escape our winters – indeed small numbers do not now leave the UK at all.

Another significant change is habitat deterioration, in part linked to population growth, so African migrants for example are struggling to find suitable over-wintering habitats. They also must cross a wider Sahara Desert twice a year and are more likely to experience difficulties in finding suitable habitats throughout their journey to refuel. In addition, they are more likely to encounter unstable weather conditions as they move north across Europe. This latter development has been particularly noticeable in the last few years so that populations of Swallows and House Martins in the Washburn have markedly reduced. Other species affected include Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Whitethroat and various waders.

Another phenomenon linked to climate change has been 'short-stopping' of migrants moving from the north and east (including locations as

far away as Siberia) to over-winter in the UK. With warming winter temperatures, wildfowl in particular do not feel the need to keep moving west if they can comfortably winter on the continent. A significant example is the Common Pochard which used always to be seen on my winter walks, especially on Lindley Wood Reservoir, but which now would be classed as rare with some years producing none at all.

Whilst these downward trends may be seen as depressing, I at least am still able to feel invigorated by my walks not only because of the exercise itself but also because there is always the chance of an exciting sighting such as the first migrants or the rare bird, so the mental and physical benefits remain very positive for me. Clearly with walking whilst birding I will miss things but on the basis that you can't regret what you have never seen I will comfortably live with that!

Finally, we must not ignore the fact that current biodiversity trends are now very clearly heading in the wrong direction, so Anne and I are strong supporters of a variety of natural history/ environmental charities. In addition, I am proud of the fact that during my stint as President of WNS we have increased the Society's income and put this money to good use supporting our local environmental organisations that are trying to make a difference – let us hope we are not too late to make the necessary changes!





# Osprey in the Wharfe Valley

Keith Allen

Osprey over Lower Barden Reservoir  
Credit: Keith Allen

Ospreys are an amber listed bird and we now have around 300 breeding pairs returning to the UK with an estimated total population of 1,500 birds.

The majority of them are seen in Scotland but numbers in England and Wales are increasing. They are a migratory species and return to the UK from Sub-Saharan Africa in the Spring. They have been seen as flyovers in the Wharfe Valley and only rarely do we ever get sightings of them feeding in our reservoirs. The image below was taken at Lower Barden reservoir on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023, where this Osprey had stayed and fished for a number of days. It provided magnificent views and good photographic opportunities. The ring on the bird's right leg was easily visible and from the number it was identified as a 2 year old bird that had fledged in South Cumbria.

# Butterfly Days

Nyree Fearnley

7 May

## Stainburn Forest

On a lovely warm, sunny day there were just 6 of us who met for the ID Day at Stainburn Forest. David and I had been a bit worried as the Milk Maid flowers had yet to appear, and these are particularly liked by the Orange-tip and Green-veined White's who both use this plant to lay their eggs on. However, as we walked along the track we all had good views of an Orange-tip female, and everyone got a good look at the very distinct mottled green underside. The Orange-tip female lacks any orange on her wings, so this is the best ID feature. We also had clear views of the underside of a Green-veined White with its very prominent green and yellow veins that give this species its name. There were plenty of Orange-tip males, and Peacocks, as well as the odd Speckled Wood and a gorgeous Brimstone male.

Not too far away from the main track is a little clearing amongst the trees where Green Hairstreaks are present, and everyone wanted to go and see if we could find any. We spotted a total of 3 of them, and again good views were had by all of this exquisite little bright green butterfly. After spending a while with them, a happy group headed back to the cars.

30 May

## Cumbrian Butterflies

On an extremely hot, sunny day 6 of us drove up to the South Lake District for a butterfly day led by Chris Winnick of Cumbria BC. We started at Latterbarrow, a beautiful site, covered in flowers, including Greater Butterfly Orchids, swathes of Common Columbine, and Common Rock-rose. We saw super fresh Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, and Dingy Skippers, as well as other species that are common down here, and our first Northern Brown Argus of the year, looking super smart. Chris then took us to 2 sites on Whitbarrow, where we saw Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, and the differences between them. Other Spring species were also seen, a fabulous day.

8 July

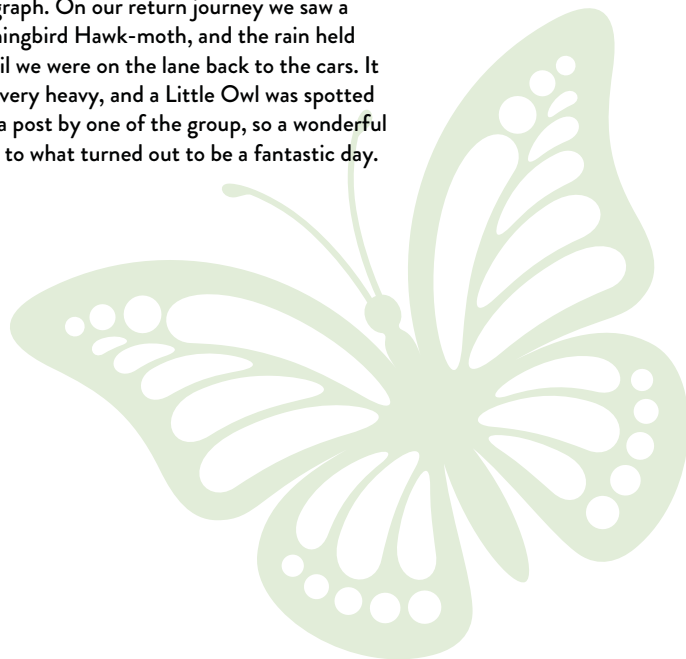
## Threshfield Quarry

On a day that was forecast for heavy showers with thunder and lightning we headed for Threshfield with more than a little trepidation. As we waited for anyone to turn up it tipped it down, but had stopped raining by the allocated time to set off. Again just 6 of us set off, and we soon saw a Red Admiral on the lane, phew we had seen a butterfly. Once into the quarry we were seeing Meadow Brown, Ringlet, and Common Blue males straight away, then 6 Red Admirals on a Budleija bush. As we made our way up the track, and along the path towards the viewing platform we saw Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Small White, Small Heath, and Speckled Wood. Getting closer to the viewing platform we found a very worn Northern Brown Argus, and had our first tantalising glimpse of a Dark Green Fritillary, our main target species. Once we got past the viewing platform, and along the rim of the quarry, a spectacular sight, we had a brief stop for dinner, conscious of the weather, which had remained dull, but fine, and reasonably warm. We were now at the hotspot for Dark Green Fritillary, and they were flying all around us, landing on the thistles. One advantage of a smaller group is that everyone had excellent views before any got spooked, and there were enough that everyone could pretty much have their own butterfly to watch and photograph. On our return journey we saw a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, and the rain held off until we were on the lane back to the cars. It wasn't very heavy, and a Little Owl was spotted sat on a post by one of the group, so a wonderful ending to what turned out to be a fantastic day.

6 August

## Sun Lane Nature Reserve

On a dull, cool, day 15 people turned up for the Butterfly ID Day. Sadly there weren't many butterflies about, but we did see Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma, Meadow Brown, and Green-veined White, and at least it stayed fine. One advantage of a cooler day is that the butterflies aren't as flighty, so at least people got good views. There were some lovely flowers too, and we had some botanists amongst us, so everyone enjoyed looking at the plants and learning about them as well, so still a successful day.







Dark Green Fritillary



Orange-tip female



Threshfield Quarry, butterfly watching



Green-veined White

Credit: Nyree Fearnley

# The Long-eared Owl

## *Asio otus*

Andy Jowett

Of the five resident species of UK owl, the Long-eared Owl is often the most difficult to encounter and the most nocturnal. I often hear phrases such as “I didn’t know we had them locally” or “I’ve never seen a Long-eared Owl”. However, given a little patience and some effort you should be rewarded with a sighting. Encounters with Long-eared Owls are one of the most enchanting wildlife experiences and are certain to be remembered for a very long time.

Long-eared Owls nest in squirrel dreys and the old nests of other birds, in particular those of the Carrion Crow and in Wharfedale show a preference for conifer woodland, mainly spruce and pine. These nests can be mimicked by the provision of lined hanging baskets, with success with these occurring in a batch of baskets erected in 2002 in the Nats recording area. Two more sets of baskets funded by WN have been installed recently which will be monitored going forward and any successes reported via the Annual Review.

Long-eared Owls hunt either by quartering areas of rough grassland sitting on a perch such as a fencepost waiting for their favoured prey of small mammals, in particular the Short-tailed Vole. Small birds and amphibians also make up their diet. The grassy/rushy parts of the moorland and in-bye land in the WNS area appear to be their favoured hunting grounds as here they have access to a plethora of food coupled with nearby woodland blocks for nesting and roosting. The smaller blocks of upland conifers also reduce their chance of conflict with the more dominant Tawny Owl *Strix alluco*.

Long-eared Owls start displaying in January, with February being the peak month, then tailing off through March and into early April. Birds can call any time after dark and are more easily encountered on still nights. This species has been referred to as the “pub owl” as the peak calling activity often coincides with pub closing time. However, a trip out into local suitable nesting habitat in February any time after dusk can be very rewarding, listening for the males’ ‘Wooo’ call, repeated every few seconds and the females more nasal call, slightly reminiscent of Collared Dove.

Egg laying occurs from mid-March to early May, with incubation lasting around 28 days. The chicks leave the nest before they can fly to dilute their chance of being predated and call to their parents when hungry. It is this call that is likened to a gate blowing on squeaky hinges. As the chicks get old, this call becomes more strident and can carry over a kilometer. The period when chicks are being fed is the best time

to see the adults hunting out in the evening, especially if the previous night’s weather was poor. There is nothing more stunning than watching an adult Long-eared Owl hunting in the golden light of a May evening.

Outside the breeding season birds often roost in groups. We have found that even in the harshest of winters such as the 2010/11 winter, birds remain on territory throughout. The species’ numbers in the UK are augmented by continental birds and these birds can form communal roosts in dense vegetation close to rough grassland such as stands of Hawthorn and conifers.

The local population is small and thinly distributed but almost certainly under-recorded. There are several challenges this species, as many others faces. Some less-enlightened gamekeepers may illegally shoot or traps these birds thinking they are a threat to their gamebirds and some maybe shot inadvertently when crow nests and squirrel dreys are ‘shot-out’. In addition, loss of suitable habitat can be an issue when the hunting grounds and nests sites are not situated close to one another. Road collisions and disturbance in an increasingly busy countryside may impact this species and there are numerous accounts of bird photographers disturbing this species when trying to get closer to the subject. I know of no direct predation incidents locally although Goshawks have been known to take this species elsewhere in the UK.

An emerging issue in other species of UK owls and birds of prey is the buildup of second generation anticoagulants used to kill rats and mice. If you think an owl may have been poisoned do not touch it without gloves and contact either the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme or if a crime is suspected the RSPB investigations team on 0300 999 0101 or [crime@rspb.org.uk](mailto:crime@rspb.org.uk).

If you are lucky enough to enjoy a sighting of a local Long-eared Owl, or even better if you prove this species has bred in the area, please report your sighting to the WNS recorder or via Birdtrack as record submissions are invaluable.



2 Long-eared Owls in flight

Credit: Sean Gray





3 Long-eared Owl chicks in nest

Credit: Andy Jowett





Credit: Nyree Fearnley



# Celebrating Grass Wood 40th Anniversary

Audrey Gramshaw and Nyree Fearnley tell us about Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's (YWT) celebration of their purchase of Grass Wood, forty years ago in 1983.

Gordon Jackson started off the celebrations with a very well-researched talk 'A Brief Story of a Journey' about the history of the purchase of Grass Wood. The background story covered the long period from when the book 'Silva Gars' (Grass Wood) was published in 1930, put together from the work of local chemist and botanist, John Crowther, and the well-known Rev J. Bailey Harker. Both recognised the importance of Grass Wood, with Crowther writing "*may we look forward to the time when the area will be acquired as a sanctuary for wildlife?*" A very long time elapsed before this sanctuary was realised.

In October 1961, Joan Duncan was invited by Clifford Smith of the YWT to join the first Grass Wood Management Committee. During the 1960s, committee meetings were held with Dr E W Taylor from the YWT, Dr Raistrick, Miss E Seares and others, organising work, notice boards and recording. Members were asked to join from local natural history societies.

Post-war, the Forestry Commission (FC) had planted commercial trees anywhere available in the UK, even on a site apparently as unsuitable as Grass Wood. However, in 1963, there was an agreement with the FC to lease the Dewbottom Scar area and the extension of Fort Gregory in 1967. The FC were also taking over sections of the wood from well-known timber merchants, Green's of Silsden. Then came the 1972 purchase of 35 acres of the south-east section from Green's, by what is now known as the YWT.

Grass Wood became the YWT's 4th declared nature reserve, with the YWT Annual Report 1983-4 stating that 'the acquisition of the freehold at Grass Wood was completed'. Gordon outlined the decades of persistent effort before the official handover of the FC deeds on 4 November 1983, which have brought us to the 40th Anniversary celebrations this year.

Jono Leadley, YWT North Regional Manager, spoke positively of current and future work, particularly the importance of working with partners to link known special sites, such as nature reserves, using corridors of land to ensure that the wildlife is not isolated.

Rachael Bice, the Chief Executive of the YWT expressed warm thanks to all involved with Grass Wood over so many years and to Gordon Jackson for his special contribution.

Martin Hanson and Audrey had the honour of cutting the spectacular tree cake, as the only two volunteers present who had also been at the handover 40 years ago - a pleasure and a privilege.

Finally, a badger captured on camera in the Gregory Scar area was shown, as a taster of exciting future work in monitoring their activities.

After an interesting morning of talks, and two amazing cakes to eat, a large group of people set off for a walk into Grass Wood itself. It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon, and some of the people had never been to Grass Wood before, so it was a stunning day to show it off at its best.



Credit: Audrey Gramshaw



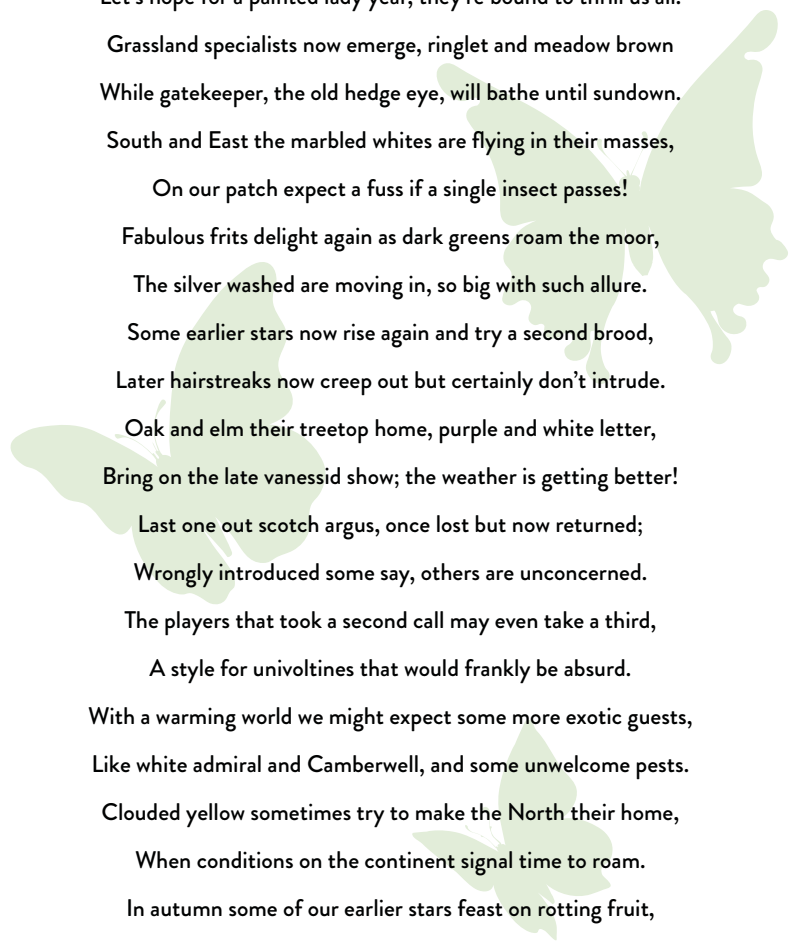
# Winged Wonders

Kelvin Smith



Captivating creatures they lift our hearts in spring,  
Sweet harbingers of warmer days as they take to the wing.  
Sundry shapes and sizes and assorted colours too,  
Red, brown, and white and yellow, and several shades of blue.  
Some with stripes and spots and dots and even one that's green,  
Some are big and blousy; others rarely seen.  
March until October is when most of them are found,  
They float and flurry and flutter and scarcely make a sound.  
We have roughly thirty species here, so let's celebrate them now,  
Roll up you splendid insects, take a lepidopteran bow.  
The show begins with that hardy band that brave the winter cold,  
Months in isolation and now, by butterfly standards, old.  
The comma may be first to show, on crenulated wing,  
On the camouflaged underside that punctuation thing.  
Brilliant brimstones fly now too, and once made someone utter,  
My God I must be seeing things that looks like flying butter.  
If tortoiseshells escape your shed and wake up in fine fettle,  
Glimpse them flitting down the hedge in search of a fresh nettle.  
The admiral too will soon appear, up north they'll all be red,  
Asleep for months in a drystone wall pretending to be dead.  
Let's not forget the peacock that flamboyant little chap,  
Will brighten up those first short days when he wakes from his nap.  
Then come the first emergents, orange tip and holly blue,  
Search out your nearest bilberry patch to find green hairstreak too.  
Three whites appear and join the show, but which is first to start,  
Green veined, the small, and then the large; tricky to tell apart.  
Now the speckled wood drops in and seems to dance for fun,  
With luck a wall will settle close and join you in the sun.  
In May a skipper could flash past, dingy, and easily missed,

A couple of small ones, copper and heath, are added to the list.  
In the Dales we have brown argus, for us the Northern form.  
Common blues then take the stage as the days begin to warm.  
Two more skippers saunter in, first large and then the small,  
Let's hope for a painted lady year, they're bound to thrill us all.  
Grassland specialists now emerge, ringlet and meadow brown  
While gatekeeper, the old hedge eye, will bathe until sundown.  
South and East the marbled whites are flying in their masses,  
On our patch expect a fuss if a single insect passes!  
Fabulous frits delight again as dark greens roam the moor,  
The silver washed are moving in, so big with such allure.  
Some earlier stars now rise again and try a second brood,  
Later hairstreaks now creep out but certainly don't intrude.  
Oak and elm their treetop home, purple and white letter,  
Bring on the late vanessid show; the weather is getting better!  
Last one out scotch argus, once lost but now returned;  
Wrongly introduced some say, others are unconcerned.  
The players that took a second call may even take a third,  
A style for univoltines that would frankly be absurd.  
With a warming world we might expect some more exotic guests,  
Like white admiral and Camberwell, and some unwelcome pests.  
Clouded yellow sometimes try to make the North their home,  
When conditions on the continent signal time to roam.  
In autumn some of our earlier stars feast on rotting fruit,  
To help survive the short dark days on the hibernation route.  
For other species too, next Spring, becomes the only quest,  
As pupae, eggs, or larvae all face the harshest test.  
As the year now turns full circle may these winged jewels win through,  
To cheer the lives of butterfly fans experienced or new!







Comma

Credit: Ian Brand



Peacock

Credit: Anne Riley



Small Tortoiseshell

Credit: Anne Riley



Credit: Ian Brand

## Fly Agaric

### Midge Leather

Thrusting through dry pine needles  
And dead birch leaves, first an orange ball  
Bursts towards day from darkened earth.

Ruptured veil on crimson sphere,  
Shiny slime dries to tough touch  
– a virgin's deflowering, then a birth.

Hallucinating slugs slink crazily around.  
Beneath, a myriad mycelia abound.  
Let not the INTERNET ABUNDER  
Ever kill our sense of wonder.



# The Wood Warbler

*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Keith Allen



A Wood Warbler singing in Heber's Ghyll

Credit: Keith Allen

Every year birdwatchers look forward to the arrival of our Spring migrants and of all the small passerines that come to breed here, the Wood Warbler is a particular favourite. It excels many species with its brightly coloured plumage described as being a zesty yellow-green with darker wings and white underparts. It also has a characteristic bold yellow eye stripe and a broad tail and is slightly smaller than a chaffinch at 12 to 13 cm.

The wood warbler is a late migrant to the UK arriving towards the end of April or early in May. Unfortunately, numbers of this species returning here have declined drastically and we now see very few of these red-listed birds in the Wharfedale area. As their name suggests wood warblers are a woodland bird and they have a preference for broadleaf forests with steep slopes. Hence, the woodland in the vicinity of the Strid on the Bolton Abbey Estate is an ideal location and these birds have been recorded there in the past. However, reports of wood warbler in this area in recent years have been sparse. We were fortunate however to see the arrival of a small number of wood warblers in Heber's Ghyll in the years 2019 and 2020. Taking an early morning walk into this woodland in May one was greeted with the lovely tuneful song of this warbler that accelerates into a trill and ends rather abruptly. With careful and considerate positioning, it was possible to take some photos of these birds in full song at eye level.

Most of our charismatic birds such as the wood warbler are essential African species that come to our shores to breed and those that migrate to Sub-Saharan Africa have shown large declines in their population. There are possibly many factors that play a part in their decline including, habitat loss, climate change, hunting, predation and food supply. Until recently very little was known about the migration route of the wood warbler. A collaborative study carried out by the RSPB and the BTO has provided a better understanding of their migration. This was achieved with information received from

geolocators fitted to four male birds. It appears that after leaving their breeding sites in the UK the wood warblers spend much of August in South-Central Europe, especially Italy. They then continue in a clockwise migration route over the Sahara in a single non-stop flight. After resting in the Sahel for 7 to 11 weeks they move on in late October/November to several countries in Western Africa (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia). Moulting takes place in Africa before the wood warblers head back across the Sahara to the UK.

The arriving wood warblers feed on insects high up on the trees but they build their nests on the ground, making them more vulnerable to disturbance. Predation is always a problem with these small passerines and it was thought that ground nesting would make them easy targets for foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels etc. However, a study carried out in a Welsh woodland showed that wood warbler nest predation was due primarily to birds with jays being the most prominent predators (Ref: Mallord JW et al., Bird Study, Nov 2011, p286-295). This study also concluded that nest predation was not a cause of the decline of the wood warbler.

Unfortunately, in the past 30 years numbers of wood warblers have declined in the UK by two thirds with the southern and central areas of England suffering the most. If this trend continues it is very likely that we will lose this species as a breeding bird in the UK. There may only be photos left to remind us of this lovely species.

# Update from Hebden Bird Group, Hebden Environmental Action Team

Ros Lilley

Hebden Environmental Action Team (HEAT) and Hebden Parish Council (HPC) have had a productive year. Funded by Swinden Quarry and managed by Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), the Hebden Beck Project (HBP) enabled the planting of alders along the side of the beck to create shade and palatable leaf litter for riverine insect larvae. Guelder roses were also planted near the bridge and snowberries were removed. HBP also positioned boulders and a ‘tree kicker’ to create eddies and increase the flow and depth diversity of the beck. During 2023, water sampling by residents and analysis by Professor Grey showed improvements in water quality.

Two sections of land owned by HPC were fenced and planted with 40 mixed fruit trees, including some old traditional varieties, to form a community orchard. Lee Johnson from YDNPA helped with advice and planting. Interestingly, a wassailing group blessed these trees on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2024!

We are continuing to cut and rake an area of grassland to create a hay meadow on High Green.

The Hebden Bird Group continued its summer migrant survey, focusing on swifts. 32 residents attended a presentation on Hebden birds. One cold July evening, 26 hardy souls attended a swift walk around the village. Whilst no ‘screaming parties’ were about, everyone saw a swift flying into a nest.

The observed increase in active swift nests must be treated with caution because we think we are simply improving our efforts to locate them. No late breeding pairs were observed this year. There were times during the cold wet weeks of the summer when some adult birds appeared

to leave the village for short periods. Young birds survive their parents’ apparent ‘desertion’ by going into torpor, another incredible swift phenomenon. We have new nest boxes in the hope of consolidating and protecting our swift population.

Swallows continue to thrive in farm barns and industrial units. One spotted flycatcher nest was active for a period but failed. One new nest with 4 eggs had 2 fledglings. Another nest was reported near the beck but was never found.

Our major concern is the decline in active nests of house martins. We identified them as vulnerable last year because 8 were on one house. Just 3 of these nests were active this year. We suspect the dry weather conditions in the early summer made some nest repairs impossible, due to a lack of wet mud. One house was renovated in the middle of the breeding season, but we think the nest would have failed anyway, again due to the difficulties of repair.

Last year Wharfedale Naturalists Society funded HEAT to buy and install nest boxes for swifts

in the village. We have installed 6 ‘peak boxes’, which seemed the best design solution for our village and are exploring ways to build our own. The location of the boxes was split between established, active nest sites for consolidation purposes, and at new sites to increase diversity. 4 of the boxes have swift calling systems attached, including those at the 3 new sites.

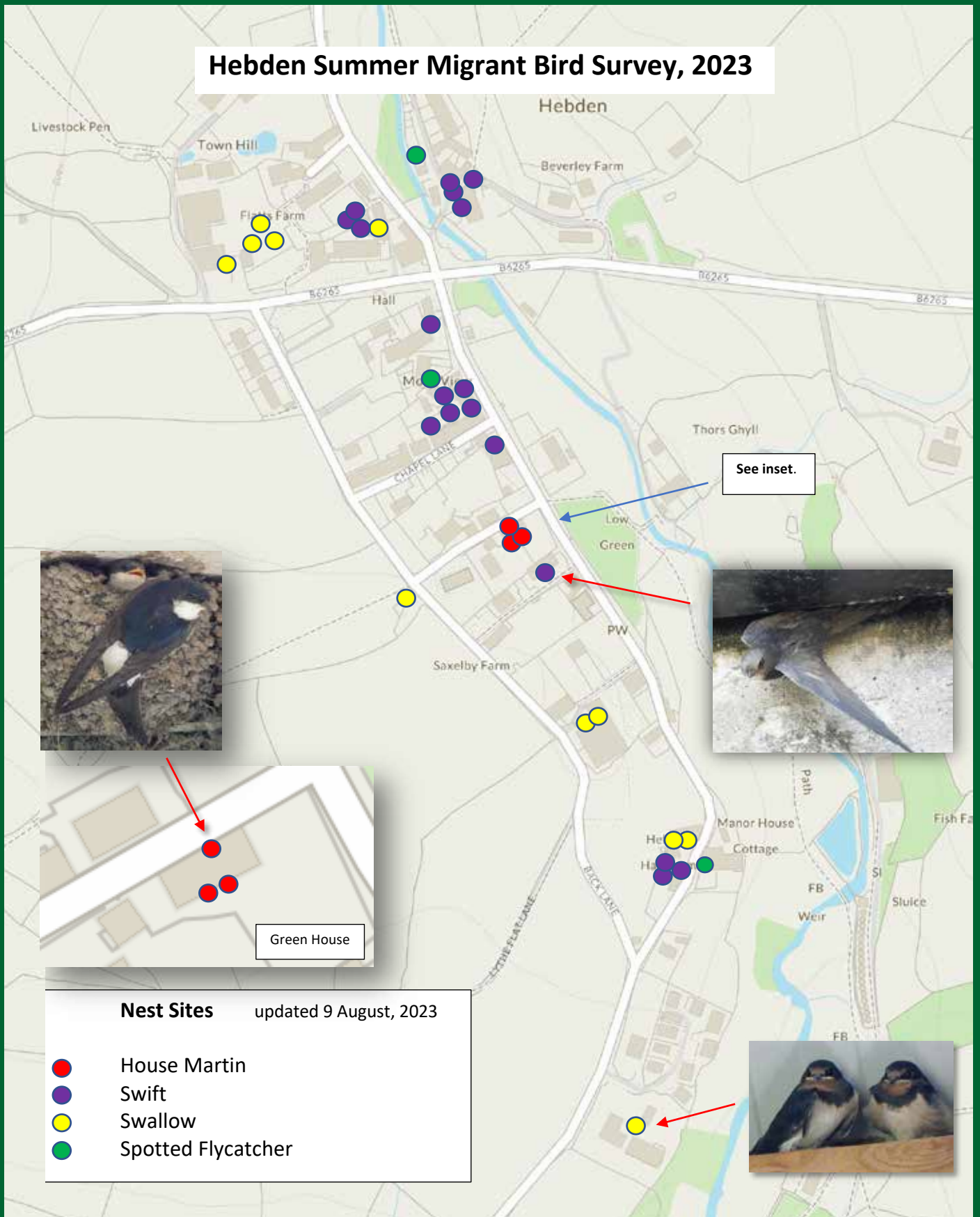
We were not expecting the boxes to be taken up immediately. One box was used to successfully rear house sparrows. A pair of prospecting swifts repeatedly occupied a second box for short periods, and we are hoping they will return to breed in 2024. No other interest was observed in 2023.

In 2024 the remainder of the grant will be used to continue to support our swift population, but also turn our attention to the plight of our house martins. Artificial nest cups can extend the breeding period for house martins and offer an alternative when weather conditions are poor. Thank you, Wharfedale Naturalists Society.

Swifts				
Active nest sites observed 2022	Active nest sites observed 2023	Highest count a crossroads 2022	Highest count a crossroads 2023	Stable, increase in observed active nest
10	18	30	35	
Swallows				
Active nest sites observed 2022	Active nest sites observed 2023			Stable
13	12			
Spotted Flycatcher				
Active nest sites observed 2022	Active nest sites observed 2023			Stable
4	3			
House Martins				
Active nest sites observed 2022	Active nest sites observed 2023			Decline
10	3			



# Hebden Summer Migrant Bird Survey, 2023



# A Year at Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits Nature Reserve (BRGP) Steve Parkes



Credit: Rich Bunce



Credit: Kelvin Smith

## Otters

In March we sadly had another road fatality. We managed to recover the body of a sub-adult male and scheduled a post-mortem in conjunction with the Cardiff University Otter Project [www.cardiff.ac.uk/otter-project](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/otter-project) They run a long-term environmental surveillance scheme, using otters to investigate contaminants, disease, and population biology across the UK. We left the body in the care of a nearby veterinary practice over the weekend, but frustratingly there was a mix-up and it was cremated by mistake!

The animal did outwardly look healthy, measuring 1.4m from head to tail and weighing 6.4 kg. So, what was the otter doing crossing the road? Well, as a sub-adult male it would have eventually been forced out of the territory by the adult dog otter. However, it was probably just looking for food; there are pheasants and hens reared on the other side of the road, so their scent may have enticed the otter to investigate. Let's hope they don't like the smell of Big Macs and McNuggets that will soon be wafting from the nearby food outlet!

On this occasion, the otter wasn't travelling far but they will frequently travel on land. Tracks have been seen at Bolton Abbey, below Simon's Seat and Upper Barden. Some people may also recall the road casualty several years ago near what was Harry Ramsden's in Guiseley, which may have been tempted by a fish supper! In all these cases the otters would have followed the beck up from the main river.

## Beavers

Yes, they do visit BRGP...as do Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Rainbows and Guides. We hosted over 100 children this summer and are keen to host more groups in 2024, so please let us know if you would like to bring a group. However, it's not for the squeamish, with leeches from pond dipping, sniffing otter poo and examining mammal skulls! We would also welcome members' donations of more items to our nature table please.

We had many reports of otter sightings over the year, including amazing footage of 5 otters from the "Walking Photographer". We struggle to understand the local otter population - are the otters we see at BRGP the same as those seen in Ilkley or even Otley?





## Work groups

Thanks again to our hard-working volunteers who continue to make the reserve attractive for wildlife and people alike. We were once again joined by Harrogate-based Open Country who helped to pull balsam and clear scrub to build up the dead hedges.

Our biggest project of the year was improving the paths. Supported by our friends from Friends of Ilkley Moor, and a donation of 20 tons of sandstone chippings from Bradford Council, we greatly improved the main path circuit. It took us a few months to complete and reckon it was the equivalent to someone walking a full wheelbarrow from Ilkley to York!

In October we cut and removed the grass and sowed more yellow rattle, collecting seed and sowing it across the marshy grassland to reduce the strength of grasses, providing more space for other flowers to colonize.

## Birding highlights

Sand martins are doing very well at BRGP, presenting a contrasting picture to the fate of their House [martin] mates. We had 2 successive years of low river levels from April to August meaning nests weren't flooded out. The high numbers of breeding pairs in 2022 brought more birds back and again many managed a second brood. Counting sand martins is tricky so we ended up counting nest holes and produced around 80. That is by far the highest number we've had at the reserve since I became involved in 2007.

The kingfishers appeared to breed some distance from the reserve this year, so sightings were limited to the summer months. However, whilst we were treated to a mandarin nesting in the kestrel box, the frequent sightings of mink (which the anglers no longer control) and otters likely meant that we saw few ducklings make it to maturity.

## Floral highlights

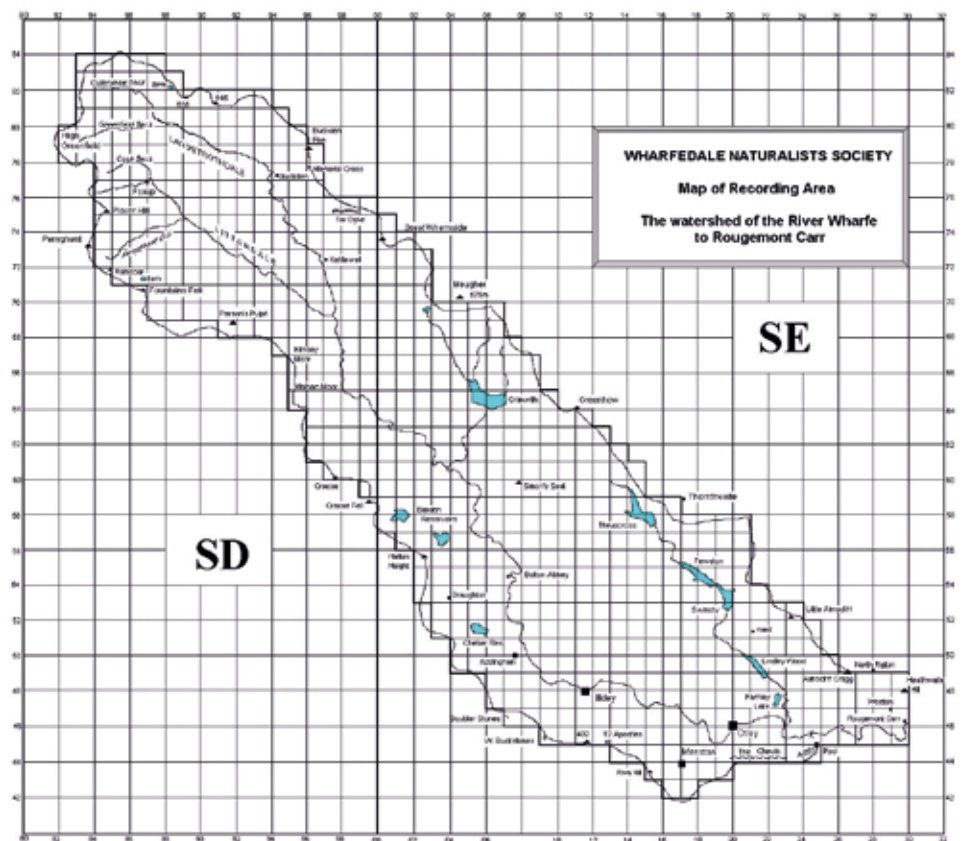
The very dry spring was observed most vividly in our swathes of teasle plants which were about half their usual height. After orchid numbers bounced back to around 200 in 2022, they dropped to around 50 flowering stems of Southern marsh orchids. Common spotted orchid numbers are still low. Thanks to Rachel Huxham for our first Twayblade record for many years.

# Wharfedale Wildlife 2023

## Our Records

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Credit: David Leather

The Wharfedale Naturalists Society has been keeping wildlife records since it began in 1945, publishing them each year in our Annual Review. These records form a cornerstone of our work, and whilst the format may have changed over the years, they are more vital than ever.

As I write, we are developing a new website where we plan to have all past Annual Reviews accessible to everyone, for both interest and research.

Our recorders all work extremely hard across the year, collecting and analysing records from members and writing their yearly reports, which you can read in subsequent pages. I would like to personally thank them all.

Hopefully, as you read the following pages, it will inspire you to submit records if you don't already, and to continue if you do. All recorders welcome your information on sightings and will provide advice on identification. You can find their contact details on both our summer and winter programmes.

Next time you go out for a walk, don't forget your notebook, pencil, binoculars, and hand lens. We would love to hear from you.

*Ian*

Ian Brand,  
President, Wharfedale Naturalists

# Birds

Andrew Kelly

**This year's bird review sees a couple of changes in train.**

Most immediate is that the time frame for these reports has changed. Previously it has covered the calendar year, January to December; this year it has been moved to cover the year October to September. This has two advantages. Firstly, it fits in more naturally with the 'bird year,' covering both one full winter and one full summer migration cycle, which means, amongst other things, not having to report winter migrants in two separate halves at each end of the year! Secondly, it provides a more realistic timescale for the preparation of the bird section for the annual review. With some 15000+ records covering 160 or so species to be processed, summarised and written-up, the usual few weeks allowed between the end of the year and copy date has become increasingly problematic, not least because the vast bulk of the records aren't actually available until sometimes well after the year has finished! By moving the year to ending at the end of the autumn departures (records for these will be extended into Oct), the Society is not limited to a recorder who can work full-time for several weeks at one go! Please note the submission dates for the forthcoming year, set out below.

Which segues (neatly?!) into the second change. This review is my last as bird recorder, as I will be standing down after its completion. I have thoroughly enjoyed the six years I've had the privilege of performing this role, but other commitments (environmental and otherwise!) mean that I simply don't have the time (even with the above changes) to give, especially at this time of the year. Fortunately, a willing volunteer has come forward, and Sam Barker has already started picking up the recorder reins! Huge thanks go to him for agreeing to take this up – I hope he enjoys it as much as I have. Contact details for Sam will be forwarded directly to all those who regularly submit records and will be published as soon as available.





## Notes on the species reports

Sources: Just over two-thirds of all records are the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) BirdTrack database. Other sources include: Addingham Environment Group (20%), local WhatsApp groups (5%), Wharfedale Naturalists (WN) members (6%).

## Taxonomy

The species accounts reflect the extensively revised taxonomic order and scientific nomenclature of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) British List 9th edition (Dec 2017).

## Descriptors

Rare: a migrant or visitor seen less than one year in three, in very low numbers. Scarce: a species seen in very low numbers, and usually at very few sites (<5); if a visitor, not every year. Uncommon: may be seen annually, but usually at few (<10) sites and in low numbers. Common: seen frequently and widely (>20 sites), or at fewer sites in large numbers.

## Nomenclature and abbreviations

The northern region is that above Barden Bridge, the southern region downstream. Barden Moor and Fell are included in the southern region, as is the Washburn Valley. Mid-Wharfedale is the part of the dale between Barden and Pool Bridges. Upper Wharfedale is thus above Barden Bridge, whilst Lower Wharfedale is below Pool Bridge. South Wharfedale refers to the valley below the A59. References to Beaverdyke, Chelker, Fewston, Grimwith, John O'Gaunt's, Lindley Wood, Swinsty, Scargill, Thruscross, Upper and Lower Barden mean the reservoirs or the area in their vicinity. Burley is Burley-in-Wharfedale, BRGP is Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits, OWNr is Otley Wetland Nature Reserve.

## Dates

The year for this review runs from October 2022 to September 2023 inclusive, covering 2022 Q4 and 2023 Q1-3. As this is the first report covering this new period, there is an overlap with the previous review, which also covered the period October – December 2022, to ensure there is no gap in coverage. As the aim of this report is to cover both a full winter and a full summer migration cycle, occasionally there may be reference when discussing summer departures to a date after the end of September; however, autumn incoming migrants and residents are generally not discussed. To try and ensure clarity, October-December for 2022 dates often have the year number attached. By default, if a date is not qualified, it should be regarded as in 2023. Autumn refers to 2022, Winter to 2022-3, Spring and Summer to 2023.

## Rare birds

One or two records for scarcer birds have had to be omitted. In all cases, this is because the species is sufficiently rare in our area to be a 'description' species, i.e. rather more information (a detailed 'description') is needed before local rare bird committees can accept them as confirmed sightings. WNS does not have its own committee and relies on acceptance by others. Unfortunately, time and/or inability to identify the observer mean that this process has not been completed in these cases.

## Escapees

Escapees are not normally included in species counts. However, a number are noted here for interest, and because they are part of the bird life that has been seen in the valley. I have certainly enjoyed including a Great White Pelican in my last review!

## Acknowledgements

My profound thanks to everybody who contributed, either directly or indirectly – your contributions are invaluable. This report is only possible because of the work and commitment of those volunteers. As a small acknowledgement of that contribution, I have tried to list here all the names of those who contributed directly. Owing to time constraints and changes in the nature of the data, credits in the species reports have not been included as in previous years, but I am no less grateful – please forgive the omission. Equally, my profound apologies if I have missed anybody off this list.

Chris & Joan Alder, Susan Barton, Avril & David Benson, Margaret Breaks, Mike & Joyce Clerk, David & Nyree Fearnley, Philip Galtry, Andy Jowett, Tom & Ruth Paynter, Paul Purves, John Poland, Susan Simcock, Brendan Threlfall, members of the Nidderdale AONB and Local Birding What's App groups, members of the Addingham Environment Group, all contributors to BTO BirdTrack. BirdTrack is organised by the BTO for the BTO, RSPB, BirdWatch Ireland, SOC, and WOS.

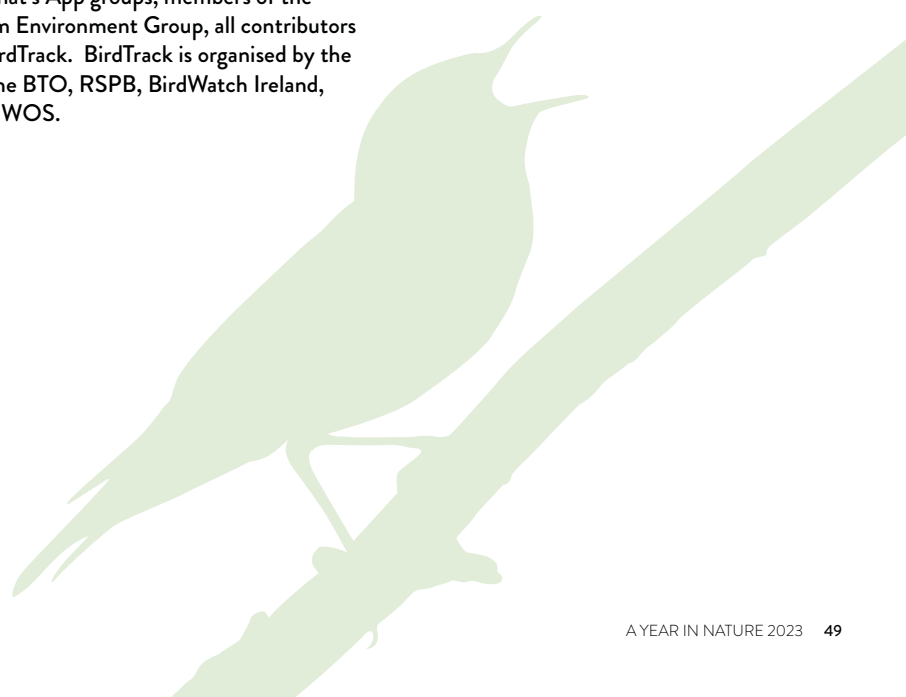
## Notes on submissions

Contributions are welcome, and much appreciated – this report would be impossible without them! However, please do note the following.

By far the best method is to submit your records via the BTO's BirdTrack system – either online at home or via their app on your mobile phone. This not only makes the recorder's job MUCH easier, but it also guarantees that the BTO receives this valuable information. If you could let the recorder know you are doing this, it would be much appreciated – the data is anonymised, so we otherwise have no record as to who is submitting what.

The new physical and email address for record submissions will be made available as soon as possible.

Please note that the review for the forthcoming year will cover the period Oct 2023 to Sep 2024 inclusive. Please ensure all records for this period are submitted before Oct 31st 2024, otherwise it may not be possible to include them in the review.



## Canada Goose

*Branta canadensis*

### Common resident breeder / visitor

Present on or near most larger stretches of open water throughout the year, autumn 2022 saw counts of 125 at Grimwith in Sep, 250 at John O'Gaunts in Oct and the same number at OWNRR in Dec (still 170 in Jan). The latter also had the highest summer count of 185 in mid-Jul, with flocks of 50-80 seen at Fewston, Swinsty, Lindley Wood and Scargill Reservoirs in the same month, and at Grimwith in Aug. Breeding was widely noted.

## Snow Goose

*Anser caerulescens*

### Rare vagrant / local escapee

Following on from the 2 birds in the Thruscross area in Feb-Mar 2022, an individual was seen in the same area in early Nov 2022, and then again Feb 2nd to Mar 5th. A final sighting was recorded flying over the Wharfe at Farnley Hall Aug 5th, in amongst (as in all instances) a flock of greylags.

## Greylag Goose

*Anser anser*

### Common resident breeder / visitor

Widely distributed throughout our area, especially on larger stretches of water. North of Grass Wood, the only double figure count was 20+ at Kilnsey Jun 12th. Southwards, peak autumn 2022 counts were 350 at OWNRR and 250 at John O'Gaunts in Dec. 100 were counted at Chelker in Mar. In the summer, OWNRR numbers regularly hit 500+ through Jun-Jul, with 400+ in the Farnley Lake-Lindley Wood area in Jun. There were 134 at March Ghyll the same month, with Grimwith also reaching 3 figures in Jul-Aug. Breeding was widely noted, including a creche of 40+ goslings at Denton Hall from the 90+ adults seen there regularly.

## Pink-Footed Goose

*Anser brachyrhynchus*

### Regular passage migrant

Overhead skeins were seen regularly during autumn and spring migrations, often in their hundreds, the largest count being 1583 arrivals over Weston Moor 21st Sep 2022. Occasional landed sightings included 25 at OWNRR 14th Dec 2022 mixed in with greylags, and another 6 there on Apr 17th; 1 was still present on the 20th.

## White-Fronted Goose

*Anser albifrons*

### Scarce passage migrant

Three birds were recorded at John O'Gaunts during the last week in Feb. Previous recent sightings were at Thruscross in Mar 2022, and in the Hoodstorth area in Oct 2018.

## Lesser White-Fronted Goose

*Anser erythropus*

### Scarce passage migrant

A single individual was recorded amongst greylag at OWNRR Apr 4th, and again Jul 13th.

## Bar-Headed Goose

*Anser indicus*

### Escapee

This species is not on the British list but has been recorded in our area most years since 2015. One was reported at Chelker 9th Oct 2022, another on Feb 19th (both AEG).

## Swan Goose

*Anser cygnoides*

### Escapee

Two were seen on a number of occasions in Jan along the Wharfe at Otley.

## Mute Swan

*Cygnus olor*

### Locally common resident breeder

This remains very much a species of the southern end of our area, the only record north of the A59 being at Bolton Abbey 31st Oct 2022. Individuals/pairs were irregularly sighted at Chelker and Addingham, with another single sighting at Ilkley May 16th. Otherwise, all reports were downstream from BRGP, including an unusual pair at High Royds pond, Menston, Mar 4th. Breeding was recorded at OWNRR (up to 5 cygnets), Wharfebank Mills (initially 6 cygnets but only 1 in Jun) and Knotford Nook.

## Whooper Swan

*Cygnus cygnus*

### Uncommon but regular passage migrant

Commonly seen on passage, first winter arrivals seen were 6 at Otley 8th Oct 2022, dropping south from Denton Moor; 10 were also at Knotford Nook 3rd Dec. In the New Year, 2 were at Chelker Jan 21st, 5 at Lindley Wood Feb 6th, 70 at Scargill Mar 3rd, 20 at OWNRR Mar 28th, 30 over Kettlewell and Kilnsey Apr 3rd. An unusually large 95 were seen at Chelker Mar 28th, where the last 6 departers were also seen Apr 11th.

## Shelduck

*Tadorna tadorna*

### Uncommon passage migrant / winter visitor, occasional breeder

For the second year running, there was a breeding pair at Riffa Pond near Pool, with 8 young recorded. Another female with young was narrowly avoided by one reporter whilst driving along A659 at the east end of Arthington on Jun 20th. Other adult sightings included 2 on the river near Grassington for 10 days at the end of Mar, 2 more at OWNRR Mar 8th, Apr 17th-27th, and again Sep 16th. There were summer records at Kex Gill Jun 10th and Fewston Jul 20th.

## Mandarin Duck

*Aix galericulata*

### Common resident breeder / winter visitor

This species is well established along the Wharfe up to Grassington, with this year's most northerly sighting at Grass Wood in May. Bolton Abbey remains the main centre, with a peak count of 56 in Dec 2022. 32 was the highest count in the Washburn, at Farnley Lake Jul 27th. For the first time, fledglings (5) were

seen at High Royds pond, otherwise all breeding records were along the Wharfe.

## Garganey

*Spatula querquedula*

### Rare visitor

After 2022's first recording since 2016, a male (and possible female) was reported from Addingham Low Mill Apr 14th (AEG), and 4 birds at Blubberhouses Jul 5th.

## Shoveler

*Spatula clypeata*

### Uncommon passage migrant

Q4 2022 records were of a female at both Knotford Nook (Dec 3rd) and OWNRR (Dec 15th). 2023 Q1-3 records were of 2 pairs at OWNRR Mar 23rd, and individuals at Mossy Moor May 27th, Scargill Sep 8th, and a female back at OWNRR Sep 16th.

## Gadwall

*Mareca strepera*

### Locally common passage migrant / winter visitor

All records were at the usual main sites: Knotford Nook and OWNRR. All bar 2 records were Sep-Apr, peaking with 22 at Knotford in mid-Dec 2022 and 14 at Otley in both Feb and Apr. Up to 3 birds were also seen at Otley irregularly through the summer.

## Wigeon

*Mareca penelope*

### Common winter visitor / passage migrant

OWNRR remains the main stronghold for this species in our area, with a peak count of 206 on Jan 18th, with 200+ into Feb and Mar. Elsewhere, there were 26 at Mossy Moor in Nov, 20+ at nearby Grimwith, Feb 4th, and 40 at Lindley Wood two days later. Knotford Nook, normally stronger on numbers, reached just 17 in Dec 2022.

## Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

### Common resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor

This species continues to be the ubiquitous year-round water bird in our area, widespread in good numbers, including several counts of 110-120 at Bolton Abbey in autumn 2022 and extensive breeding observed. Beyond the Wharfe, highest count was 62 on the relatively small pond at High Royds in Jun.

## Pintail

*Anas acuta*

### Scarce passage migrant / winter visitor

Up to 2 birds were recorded at Knotford Nook 26th Nov-3rd Dec 2022. At OWNRR there was another pair on Mar 7th, followed by one individual Aug 10th. An individual was also recorded at Scargill Sep 8th, echoing the 3 seen in the same location in Sep 2022.



## Teal

*Anas crecca*

**Common passage migrant / winter visitor, occasional breeder**

Earliest winter arrivals seen were at High Royds 21st Sep 2022 and Fewston 3rd Oct 2022. Numbers peaked with 28 at OOWNR in mid-Dec. Otherwise, reports were widely spread as far north as Grimwith, in single digit counts.

## Pochard

*Aythya ferina*

**Uncommon passage / winter visitor**

A bird that has declined from a common regular visitor to just occasional sightings, of which there were none in two of the last 3 years. 4 were seen at Knotford Nook 10th Oct 2022, and up to 4 (including at least 2 female) 18th-20th Dec 2022 at OOWNR. One was also seen at OOWNR Apr 17th. A single drake was recorded on a pond to the west of Denton on the unusual date of Aug 10th.

## Tufted Duck

*Aythya fuligula*

**Common resident / winter visitor; occasional breeder**

In the north, up to 13 at a time were seen at Kilnsey May-Aug; there were also individual sightings of 1-3 birds at Grassington, Hebden Beck, Mossy Moor and Grimwith Mar-Jun. Washburn counts were up, with 38 on Fewston at the start of 2023, and 50+ on Swinsty at the beginning of Mar, 6-8 at John O'Gaunts Jun-Aug. In the main valley, peak numbers included 33 at OOWNR in Feb, 27 at Knotford Nook in Dec, and 10 at Chelker in Feb. Single digit numbers were also recorded on tarns on Ilkley and Burley Moors.

## Common Scoter

*Melanitta nigra*

**Scarce passage migrant**

Up to 3 birds were recorded at OOWNR Apr 11th-17th, and 2 on Lower Barden Apr 15th - May 8th. A small flock of 6 was at Fewston Jun 19th. Towards the end of Q3, a single bird was recorded at Thruscross Sep 11th, followed by 4 at OOWNR on the 15th.

## Goldeneye

*Bucephala clangula*

**Locally common winter visitor / passage migrant**

Both OOWNR and Knotford Nook support a regular overwintering population, with counts peaking at 38 (23rd Dec 2022) and 21 (17th Dec 2022) respectively. Elsewhere up to 9 were at Chelker Dec-Feb, 6 at Barden Moor Jan 16th, 2 at Grimwith (16th Nov 2022), and 1-4 on the lower Washburn reservoirs Jan-Feb. As in 2022, a single summer bird was recorded at OOWNR.

## Goosander

*Mergus merganser*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

Present all along the main river south of Kettlewell, with limited sightings elsewhere. Several double figure counts were recorded along the Hebden-Bolton Abbey stretch

throughout Q3 (only one mentioning young). At OOWNR, 7 were seen on 23 Dec 2022, 8 at Knotford Nook in the same month. Washburn counts were limited to individuals seen at Fewston and Lindley Wood Nov to Feb. Breeding was widely noted along the river.

## Red Grouse

*Lagopus lagopus*

**Common resident breeder**

This species tends to be taken for granted in our area, and is without doubt significantly under-reported, although present on most moorland areas. Highest count was 23 on Ilkley Moor in Jun. Records at other locations were mostly in single digits.

## Grey Partridge

*Perdix perdix*

**Uncommon resident breeder**

Records of this increasingly scarce bird were mainly on eastern fells between Kettlewell and Grassington, with several sightings of up to 11 birds at Yarnbury Nov-Apr, 2 at Coverdale Head Apr 4th, 2 at Kettlewell May 3rd, and 2 at the top of Hebden Beck May 13th. South of these, there were just 3 records: 10 at the top of Ben Rhydding Drive 2nd Nov 2022, 1 at March Ghyll Jun 6th, and a remarkable 18 at the end of Q3 at Weeton.

## Golden Pheasant

*Chrysolophus pictus*

**Escapee**

A single bird was sighted on a number of occasions in the Fewston area between Jan 31st and Jun 19th, presumably an escapee.

## Pheasant

*Phasianus colchicus*

**Common resident breeder subject to extensive rearing/releases**

Given the volume of imports, artificial rearing, and the annual release, it is almost inevitable that this species is common throughout our area. Most records were in single digits, with low double-digit numbers on occasions.

## Quail

*Coturnix coturnix*

**Rare passage migrant / visitor**

A single bird was noted by 2 separate recorders calling in fields east of Otley Jun 30th-Jul 1st; the only previous record of this bird in the past decade was one passing overhead in the same location in Jul 2021.

## Red-Legged Partridge

*Alectoris rufa*

**Common resident breeder, all from released birds.**

Whilst not quite as ubiquitous as pheasant, this is another bird that is common throughout our area due to artificial cultivation. Counts, whilst geographically widespread, were almost all in single digits, except for on the Devonshire Estate, which peaked at 10; 28 were also counted on a walk in the Skyreholme area at the end of Jun.

## Nightjar

*Caprimulgus europaeus*

**Scarce migrant breeder**

The majority of reports continued to come from Stainburn Forest starting on May 21st, with up to 10 at a time seen throughout Jun. 2-3 were noted May 28th - Jul 27th at Timble Ings. Further north on Barden Moor/Intake Plantation, 4 were recorded on 2 occasions in late May. An individual was also reported late in the season at Threshfield Sep 9th.

## Swift

*Apus apus*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

After a very late start to 2022, the first 2023 sighting was back to the end of Apr, a single bird surprisingly as far north as Threshfield on the 29th, followed by another at Burley Apr 30th, then at Bolton Abbey May 1st, with 4 at Kettlewell on the 3rd. Larger counts as usual came towards the end of the season, the 180 seen at March Ghyll Jul 22nd being one of the largest in recent years. There were also 70 at Mossy Moor mid-Jul, with 50 at OOWNR and 25+ at East Otley and Menston towards the end of the month. Numbers fell off dramatically in Aug, with only singletons recorded, and unusually only one in Sep, during a migration watch at Stainburn Moor on the 3rd.

## Cuckoo

*Cuculus canorus*

**Uncommon migrant breeder**

First birds were heard at Burley Apr 18th, and at Bolton Abbey on the 25th, a week earlier than last year and more in line with previous years. Most records were of individuals, although up to 4 were recorded on Denton Moor on a number of occasions in May, with the same number at Buckden on the 24th. Outside the Washburn valley, the last bird was at Denton Moor Jun 19th, whilst in the Fewston-Thruscross area records persisted until Jul 5th, at Low Dam.

## Feral Pigeon

*Columba livia*

**Common resident breeder**

Records suggest that this species is under-recorded, but they do reflect its adaptability to a wide variety of habitats, spread widely across our area. There were a higher number of birds reported in northerly locations this year, including 30+ at Kilnsey in Aug. It still remains though that by far the largest proportion of records were in the southern main valley with sightings throughout the year, many from gardens, although the only double figure reports were from the population of 100+ birds resident near the bridge at Otley.

## Stock Dove

*Columba oenas*

**Common resident breeder**

Reports came from all across our area, almost exclusively in low single digits, many from gardens. Highest count was 6 at Bolton Abbey Jan 31st.

## Woodpigeon

*Columba palumbus*

**Common resident breeder**

This continues to be one of the most ubiquitous species in our area. Most counts were small, the only ones over 30 being c70 at Kilnsey Jan 29th, and 38 at OOWNR Mar 15th.

## Collared Dove

*Streptopelia decaocto*

**Common resident breeder**

A species that first arrived in the 1950s, peaked in the 90s, but has since seen a steady decline, although remaining familiar enough, particularly in urban areas, to almost certainly be under-reported. An unusually high 20 were noted at Threshfield in Oct 2022, and 22 at Addingham in Dec 2022. No 2023 counts exceeded 4.

None were reported north of Grass Wood, and a single bird at Blubberhouses May 26th was the only Washburn record.

## Water Rail

*Rallus aquaticus*

**Scarce resident breeder; uncommon passage/ winter visitor**

As last year, all records but one of this bird were from OOWNR, including a count of 7 on Jan 2nd and 4 (including young) on Jul 14th. There was an exceptional report of a single bird from Conistone Moor May 2nd.

## Moorhen

*Gallinula chloropus*

**Common resident breeder / passage visitor**

Recorded all along the Wharfe up to Buckden and along the Washburn, all these counts in single figures. A high of 14 (on several occasions) was again noted at High Royds pond. Breeding was also seen here, as well as at Grassington, Barden Bridge, Gallows Hill and at Low Dam.



Juvenile Coot, Threshfield. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Coot

*Fulica atra*

**Locally common resident breeder; passage/ winter visitor**

Geographically limited to the south of our area, with 6 locations in 2023. Knotford Nook remained the main centre, with 97 in Dec 2022. Counts at OOWNR peaked in mid-Feb at 42, and end-Aug at 42, almost double recent highs here. The only other locations were Scargill (2 in May-Jun), Lindley Wood (1 in Jul), a pair regularly seen through the summer at Denton Hall pond, and 4 at John O'Gaunts Jun 6th.

## Little Grebe

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

**Uncommon resident / winter visitor; occasional breeder**

All records but one this year were from south of the A59, the exception being an individual at Grassington on Jan 25th. Most counts were of 1-2, although an exceptional 8 were recorded at BRGP in Dec 2022 and 5 at OOWNR in Jan. Up to 4 birds were seen resident at Denton Hall throughout 2023, the same number also at Scargill Aug 18th, and at John O'Gaunts Jun-Sep. For the first (and so far, only) time, a single bird was seen on High Royds pond on Jan 14th. Other locations included Knotford Nook and Burley.

## Great Crested Grebe

*Podiceps cristatus*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

Unusually, 2 birds were recorded at Kilnsey May 22nd. Otherwise, all records continued to come from this species' usual sites in the south of our area: Knotford Nook, OOWNR, the lower Washburn reservoirs and Chelker. 4 were at Knotford Nook 10th Oct 2022, otherwise all counts were from 1-3, spread throughout the year. No young were noted.



Oystercatcher, Grassington. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Oystercatcher

*Haematopus ostralegus*

**Locally common migrant breeder**

After a near 4-month gap, the first birds of 2023 were recorded at Grassington Jan 30th. After that, there were sightings the full length of our area until the end of Aug, with several 100+ counts at Grassington peaking at 183 on Mar 14th. Other highs were 60 at Hebden (Feb 14th), 85 at Bolton Abbey (Feb 27th), 70+ at Grimwith (Mar 2nd). 90 at Kex Gill (Apr 4th). Later numbers were mostly in single digits, although there were 30+ at Blubberhouses May 26th and 40+ at Mossy Moor Jun 5th. Young were reported at Barden Bridge, Grimwith and Threshfield in Jun.



Lapwing, Yokenthwaite. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

An exceptionally high count of c930 was recorded from Coutances Way, Ilkley Jan 10th. Other winter counts included 300 at Addingham, c200 at Barden Moor, Denton and OOWNR, and 100+ counts at Knotford Nook, BRGP, Chelker and Grimwith, and Scargill. Numbers were lower and more widely spread across most upland areas during breeding, before picking up in Q3: the first 100+ count was at OOWNR Jul 15th, then subsequently at Barden Moor (peak of 500+, Jul 27th), March Ghyll (250, Aug 10th), Denton (c100, Aug 29th), Addingham (100, Aug 30th) and Scargill (350, Sep 8th). Young were seen at Linton Mills, Grassington Moor, Yarnbury, and Threshfield, with other breeding related activity widely spread.



Lapwing and Golden Plover, Thruscross. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Golden Plover

*Pluvialis apricaria*

**Locally common resident breeder; passage/ winter visitor**

100+ Feb-Apr counts were recorded at Skyreholme, Grassington Moor, Ilkley Moor and Scargill, with 300 at Denton Moor Apr 1st and 330 at Conistone Moor (Kelber) two days later. Into Q2-3 numbers were all in single figures, widespread on high ground, until migration watch near Stainburn Moor picked up its first flock of 140 on Aug 28th, increasing to a count of 2000 in mid-Oct.

## Ringed Plover

*Charadrius hiaticula*

**Uncommon passage visitor / occasional breeder**

Reports were far more geographically diverse than in 2022, when all came from the Grimwith area.

This was the location of the first record, 3 on Mar 2nd, but others were seen at Barden Moor/Scale (max 4), Grassington (2), Mossy Moor, Kex Gill (1), and OOWNR (3), the last over Middleton Moor Aug 9th. There was some indirect evidence of possible breeding, including an apparent nest scrape at Mossy Moor.

## Little Ringed Plover

*Charadrius dubius*

**Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First birds were 2 at Hebden Apr 7th. 1-2 were then seen in various locations from Grassington to Barden Bridge, including Lower Barden and Grimwith, until Jun 13th. An unusual singleton was recorded at Kilnsey May 22nd, whilst there were 3 records of 2 furthest south at OOWNR in Apr.



## Whimbrel

*Numenius phaeopus*

**Uncommon passage migrant**

The only report was of 2 at Strid Woods May 16th; no extra detail was available (a BTO record).

## Curlew

*Numenius arquata*

**Common resident breeder / passage migrant**

Higher winter counts of up to 500 were focused on fields either side of the Wharfe in the Ben Rhydding-Denton area (with 100+ further east at Weston in Jan). Otherwise, they were lower than in previous years, the largest being just 40 at Knotford Nook (31st Dec 2022), and 37 at OBNR Jan 2nd, although there were 54 later at Scargill Mar 24th. Most records during the breeding season were in single figures, on uplands, although 20-30 at a time were recorded above Kettlewell, and in the Washburn at Stainburn Forest and Swinsty. Young were seen at Strid Woods. 200 at Weston and 30 at Burley were the only double-digit post-breeding records.

## Ruff

*Calidris pugnax*

**Rare passage migrant**

For a third successive year this normally rare passage migrant was recorded passing through our area, with 2 at Stainburn Moor Sep 8th (one day earlier than the sole 2022 record).

## Dunlin

*Calidris alpina*

**Uncommon passage migrant**

After two singletons in the autumn of 2022 (Weston Moor Oct 10th, OBNR Dec 20th), 2023 saw another 2 records added: 1 at Chelker Apr 22nd, and a small flock of 5 in the Hebden Beck-Mossy Moor area May 27th.

## Woodcock

*Scolopax rusticola*

**Resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor**

2022 Q4 saw single birds recorded at OBNR Oct 19th, and at Skyreholme and BRGP in Dec. After Mar 17th, 1-4 birds were reported through to the end of Jun in the Washburn Valley (Timble – 5 on Apr 4th, Stainburn, Thruscross), and round Bolton Abbey (6 at Barden Bridge May 26th). Other records also came from Lea Green (19th Apr), Denton Moor (5 on May 30th, 2 on Jun 9th) and East Otley (Mar 19th).

## Jack Snipe

*Lymnocyrtus minimus*

**Scarce passage migrant / winter visitor**

As recorded in the previous report, but in our 'overlap' period this year, an individual was seen at Sandwith Moor 17th Oct 2022.

## Snipe

*Gallinago gallinago*

**Resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor**

Mostly recorded in ones and twos in lowland wetlands and reserves during the winter (BRGP, Sun Lane, OBNR, with up to 6 at High Royds pond), and widespread on upland areas during the breeding season, although there were no reports of young. Counts up to 43 were recorded at Stainburn Moor during autumn migration.

## Common Sandpiper

*Actitis hypoleucos*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

Widely distributed along the Wharfe and other stretches of water, first sighting was on Apr 3rd at Ghaistrill's Strid, with regular reports until a single bird on the river at Ilkley Aug 23rd. Highest count was 11 pairs at Grimwith May 1st. Aside from 13 at Strid Woods Jun 10th and 10 at Fewston a week later, other counts were all in low single digits. Young were observed here, and at Kilnsey, Kettlewell and Bolton Abbey.

## Green Sandpiper

*Tringa ochropus*

**Uncommon passage migrant**

After the string of autumn 2022 records reported in the last review, 2023 saw 3 more sightings added to the year list: one at OBNR Feb 8th and again Apr 14th, and another individual overflying Stainburn Moor Sep 23rd.

## Redshank

*Tringa totanus*

**Uncommon passage visitor / occasional migrant breeder**

An early individual was at Skyreholme Feb 12th, with the next not until the rather more usual Mar 6th at Grassington. Up to 4 were then seen most days in the Grassington-Bolton Abbey areas until end-Jun. Elsewhere one was recorded in the Blubberhouses-Kex Gill area Apr-Jun, and up to 4 in the Denton Moor-March Ghyll area May-Jun. There were also sightings of 1-3 birds at OBNR Mar-Apr.

## Spotted Redshank

*Tringa erythropus*

**Rare passage visitor**

A single bird was reported at Strid Woods May 5th. No extra detail was available (a BTO record).

## Black-Headed Gull

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

**Common resident breeder, passage / winter visitor**

Easily the most common gull in our area, widespread in large numbers throughout the year, and often ignored by observers. Late 2022 counts included 400+ at OBNR in Nov and 200 at Knotford Nook in Dec. Into 2023, and early counts included 300 at Lindley Wood (Feb 6th), 233 at Strid Woods (8th) and 168 at Grassington (9th). 400+ were seen at Barden Moor Apr 15th, matched by other counts into

May and Jun. Aug reports saw 250 at OBNR (10th) and 140 at Scargill (25th).

## Little Gull

*Hydrocoloeus minutus*

**Rare migrant / visitor**

One was briefly seen on the eastern lake at OBNR Apr 11th, the first recorded in our area this century.

## Mediterranean Gull

*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

**Scarce passage / winter visitor**

Single birds were seen at OBNR 11th Dec 2022, and next to the river at Grassington Feb 9th.

## Common Gull

*Larus canus*

**Common passage / winter visitor**

Widespread in larger numbers during winter months, this species occurs in only occasional single figures in the summer. Autumn-winter 2022/23 highs were recorded at Knotford Nook (250, Dec 15th), OBNR (200, Dec 23rd), Addingham (c150, Feb 23rd), and into the spring with 300 at Threshfield Mar 22nd.

## Great Black-Backed Gull

*Larus marinus*

**Uncommon passage / winter visitor**

Up to 2 birds were seen regularly in the Barden Bridge-Moor area, Mar-Sep. 2 were also seen at Grimwith Aug 27th-29th, and at Ilkley Moor Jun 13th.

## Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*

**Uncommon visitor, increasingly common**

Sightings for this previously uncommon species continued to increase throughout the year. 30+ were recorded at Kettlewell Jan 15th, similar numbers at Beamsley Feb 6th, and at Scargill and Grassington in early Mar. Otherwise, counts were almost all in single figures, although 10 were seen together at Kilnsey Jun 12th.

## Yellow-Legged Gull

*Larus michahellis*

**Scarce visitor**

Recorded on average every 2-3 years in our area recently, an individual was seen at Bolton Abbey May 13th, the same location as that seen in 2022.





Lesser Black Backed Gull with Crayfish. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Lesser Black-Backed Gull

*Larus fuscus*

**Common resident / passage visitor; has bred.**

Geographically and temporally widespread in our area, usually in small numbers. High counts included 40 at Threshfield (Mar 12th), 20 at Grassington (Mar 31st), 30 at Kilnsey (May 22nd). A very unusual 85 were noted at Scargill Jul 7th, whilst Aug counts peaked at 14 (March Ghyll, 28th) and 20 (Addingham, 30th). Q3 finished off with 62 on Barden Moor Sep 30th.

## Sandwich Tern

*Sterna sandvicensis*

**Rare passage / summer visitor**

One was recorded at OOWNR Apr 11th, whilst 3 were seen overhead near Stainburn Moor passing through our area on Sep 18th. Previous sightings were two overhead at Otley during lockdown in May 2020, and another two flying up the Washburn and across Thruscross, again in May. This is only the 13th year this bird has been recorded in our area in the past 43 years, with over half the records in the 1970s.

## Common Tern

*Sterna hirundo*

**Uncommon passage / summer visitor; occasionally breeds**

Two birds were seen at OOWNR Apr 10th, with single birds seen twice later in the month.

## Arctic Tern

*Sterna paradisaea*

**Rare passage / summer visitor**

A single bird of this species was reported at Knotford Nook Apr 19th, another at Chelker with black-headed gulls on Jun 2nd. The only previous sighting since 2010 was in 2016, a remarkable flock of 90 birds flying north-east over the Barden Scale viewpoint May 10th.

## Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

**Common resident / visitor; occasional breeder**

Counts at OOWNR consistently totalled 20+ birds throughout the winter, peaking at 27 on Dec 8th. The only other location to see double figures in 2023 was Lindley Wood: 10 in Feb, 20 in Sep. Otherwise, sightings were evenly spread along the main stretches of water in single figures throughout the year.

## Grey Heron

*Ardea cinerea*

**Common resident breeder**

Regularly recorded along most main water courses, although there were no records for Littondale this year. Usually reported singly, 6 were seen together on 2 occasions: at OOWNR (15th Dec 2022) and Linton. (May 17th). Garden overflights were noted at Burley and Menston.

## Great White Egret

*Ardea alba*

**Scarce visitor**

The individual seen at OOWNR throughout Dec 2022 extended its stay to at least Jan 22nd. 1 was seen flying west over Leathley Aug 24th, with another 4 noted flying in formation over Stainburn Moor during migration watch on Sep 3rd.

## Little Egret

*Egretta garzetta*

**Increasingly common visitor**

**Until recently this was regarded as a scarce**

visitor. This year it was recorded widely in every month all along the Wharfe, with the Kettlewell sighting on Christmas Day 2022 remaining the most northerly record to date. All 2023 Q1-Q3 records were of ones or twos. This species remains scarce in the Washburn valley, with just one record in 2023 after the blank previous year, an individual at Lindley Wood Jun 27th.

## Great White Pelican

*Pelecanus onocrotalus*

**Escapee**

A juvenile bird was seen flying through Wharfedale by numerous observers (some not quite believing their eyes!) on Aug 21st, briefly landing at Middleton and then continuing on over Denton Moor. The 14-week-old bird had escaped from Blackpool Zoo on Aug 4th, apparently spooked by a flock of black-headed gulls, and was recovered at Hay-a-Park, Harrogate on the 24th. Its wings are now clipped!

## Osprey

*andion haliaetus*

**Scarce but regular passage migrant**

Spring migrants were recorded on Apr 25th at Burley and on May 6th at Lower Barden Rsr. One was reported over Ilkley Moor Jun 13th. Departing birds were noted on Jul 27th at Lindley Wood and on three consecutive days Aug 27th-29th, the first day at Thruscross and the next two at Barden Bridge. One was also seen at the end of Q3 overflying the migration watchpoint near Stainburn Moor.

## Sparrowhawk

*Accipiter nisus*

**Common resident breeder**

Widely noted from Kettlewell southwards. Almost all sightings were single birds, plus a handful of pairs. Perhaps the most common raptor to be seen in gardens, with sightings in most southern settlements. Young were seen at OOWNR and Farnley Lake.

## Goshawk

*Accipiter gentilis*

**Scarce passage migrant**

Single birds were reported at Barden Bridge and over Pool, Mar 17th and 19th respectively.

## Marsh Harrier

*Circus aeruginosus*

**Uncommon passage migrant / visitor**

An individual was first reported in our area in Jan, and then on several occasions Jun-Aug on the moors between Wharfedale and the Washburn. There was also a sighting of an individual cream crown further north at Pock Stone's Moor Jul 20th.

## Hen Harrier

*Circus cyaneus*

**Uncommon passage / winter visitor**

As in previous years, there was a series of sightings, mostly of single ringtails, during the winter months over the moors either side of the Washburn and in the Barden Bridge area, with a final record on Mar 12th, except for a single summer sighting near Beamsley Beacon in Aug.

## Red Kite

*Milvus milvus*

**Common resident breeder**

We are lucky to have this bird so common in our area that it is almost certainly well under-reported. Largest count this year was over 50 at Denton Feb 8th, with numerous double-digit counts throughout the year. A single bird at Yockenthwaite Moor Feb 14th was the most northerly record since 2020. Evidence of breeding was noted in the Washburn valley and near Denton.

## Buzzard

*Buteo buteo*

**Common resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor**

The most widespread and commonly recorded raptor in our area. Most sightings, as ever, were of 1-2 birds, but 12 were seen twice in March and 20 in Jun near Barden Bridge, with 10 at Addingham Moorside in early Aug. Six were seen at March Ghyll in Jul included young; young were also heard near Denton Hall early in Jun.

## Barn Owl

*Tyto alba*

**Resident breeder**

As recently as 2009, this species was seen at only one location in our area. For the first time since then, location numbers dipped, down to 20 in 2023, although geographical expansion continued, with a report from Greenfield May 15th being the most northerly record to date. There were also records for Cray Aug 28th and Buckden Jun 10th. Most sightings were of 1-2 birds, apart from up to 5 on Denton Moor on several occasions throughout the year, and 6 at Scargill in Mar. Evidence of breeding was noted at Greenfield, March Ghyll, Ilkley, OOWNR, Stainburn, and Weeton.



## Little Owl

*Athene noctua*

### Resident breeder

After multiple sightings in Dec-22 at OWRN, Threshfield and Kettlewell, up to 2 birds were seen in the Barden Bridge-Bolton Abbey area on a number of occasions Q1-3; at OWRN and nearby Q2-3; in Addingham Q1-2. Single birds were recorded at Menston (Jan), Sun Lane (Feb), Threshfield (Apr), Kettlewell (Jun), Hebden Beck (Jun), Storiths (Jul), Weeton (Aug), all representing fewer numbers than recorded in recent years.



Long-Eared Owl, Greenhow. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Long-Eared Owl

*Asio otus*

### Uncommon migrant breeder

All 2022-23 records, mostly of a single bird, were in and around the Denton Estate, including young reported in June.

## Short-Eared Owl

*Asio flammeus*

### Uncommon resident / migrant breeder

A record of 2 birds at Barden 18th Nov was the only one for autumn-winter, with the first in 2023 on Apr 3rd at Oughtershaw. This was followed by a series of reports of up to 4 birds in that area through to Jul, including young. Further south, individuals were seen at Threshfield Moor (Apr 28th) and Kettlewell (Jun 6th). One was also reported in Apr and Jun on Denton Moor. Unusually, there were no reports from the Washburn valley.

## Tawny Owl

*Strix aluco*

### Common resident breeder

Often heard but unrecorded, this species is widely present in our area, far more so than records might suggest. Reports extended north to Kettlewell (May 3rd), with other northerly reports from Threshfield, Grass Wood and Hebden, and regular records on the Devonshire estates. Most southern reports were from gardens in and around the main settlements. Young were recorded at Timble Ings and East Otley.

## Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

### Resident breeder

Commonly seen in ones or twos along the Wharfe from Hubberholme to Gallows Hill, less so elsewhere, with just 2 sightings along the Washburn: 2 at Lindley Wood in Jul and 1 at Blubberhouses in Aug. Unusually, none were recorded below Gallows Hill this year.

## Great Spotted Woodpecker

*Dendrocopos major*

### Common resident breeder

A species that is widespread throughout the woodlands of our area, reported from Cray to Weeton. Most commonly recorded during the early part of the year, when birds are easily identified by their distinctive drumming, there were still numerous records in every month, sites including many gardens. A male feeding young was seen in a Burley garden Jun 12th.

## Green Woodpecker

*Picus viridis*

### Common resident breeder

This is a species that is seen proportionally more in the northern half of our area than most. Records extended up to Yockenthwaite, and into Littondale with main concentrations at Grass Wood and Bolton Abbey. Reports thinned out southwards, with single bird records on the Chevin (Jan-Mar) being the only reports downstream of one at March Ghyll (Sep 10th). Birds were also recorded regularly around all the Washburn reservoirs apart from Lindley Wood. Little was noted by way of breeding.

## Kestrel

*Falco tinnunculus*

### Common resident breeder / passage migrant

One of the most geographically widespread species in our area, with records from Beckermonds and Pen-y-Ghent to Weeton mainly on uplands and farmland, although also seen over urban areas, including gardens. Counts were almost all 1-2, although 4-6 were regularly seen at March Ghyll throughout the year. Evidence of breeding was noted at Denton and Pool.

## Merlin

*Falco columbarius*

### Uncommon resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor

The large majority of sightings this year, all of 1-2 birds, were on the moors between Conistone and Skyreholme Feb-Aug; displaying was noted on Grassington Moor Apr 8th. Other sightings included singletons at Sandwith Moor Nov 2022 and Denton Moor Apr 3rd.

## Hobby

*Falco subbuteo*

### Uncommon but regular summer visitor

An unusually early sighting on Apr 3rd at Grassington ('above Bare House') was the only northern report. The next was not until May 29th, at Denton Moor. Others ranged from the

beginning of Jun to Sep 24th, plus one the 29th near Stainburn Moor during migration watch; almost all of these were in the south and east of our area, the only exception being two sightings in Jun near Barden Bridge. Breeding was noted near Farnley and at Timble Ings.

## Peregrine

*Falco peregrinus*

### Resident breeder / passage migrant

The predominance of the Conistone-Grassington moors amongst 2022 sightings was not reflected in 2023, with just one from Yarnbury in Jun. Instead, most northerly sightings were reported near Threshfield, where young were witnessed (the only records of more than 1 bird), and around the Valley of Desolation. Further south, there were three earlier reports from Denton Moor in Feb, Pool and Ilkley Moor in Apr. There was also a single Washburn sighting on Sep 21st.

## Ring-Necked Parakeet

*Psittacula krameri*

### Possible escapee

The only records for this period were those for autumn 2022 included in the last report: 1 then 3 birds a week apart in Oct, over a garden in Pool.

## Jay

*Garrulus glandarius*

### Common resident breeder

Counts for this well spread and common woodland species, seen as far north as Grass Wood, were mostly in ones and twos throughout the year. No breeding was noted.

## Maggpie

*Pica pica*

### Common resident breeder

Whilst ubiquitous throughout the southern area, sightings north of Grass Wood remained distinctly fewer, with up to 2 birds reported at Kettlewell and Buckden twice each in May-Jun. Counts were relatively low, only three at the end of the 2022 at OWRN reaching double figures (max 14), and one at Addingham (11, Jan 28th) although up to 8 together were seen regularly at High Roysds throughout the year.

## Jackdaw

*Coloeus monedula*

### Common resident breeder

One of the most widespread species in our region, reported from all areas in large numbers, if not matching those of previous years – although one count of 2000 birds flying to roost over Otley Mar 11th did come up to scratch! Otherwise, 2023 high counts included OWRN (150+, Jan 26th), Bolton Abbey (250+, Feb 1st), BRGP (c400, Mar 2nd), Kettlewell (117, May 3rd), Hubberholme (60+, Jul 5th), Ilkley (c500, Jul 29th) and March Ghyll (200+, Aug 19th).

## Rook

*Corvus frugilegus*

**Common resident breeder**

Widespread and populous, but often taken for granted where there are rookeries. Almost one-third of all counts simply record a presence, with no numbers. The only 3-digit record this period was of 100 at March Ghyll Aug 28th.

## Carrion Crow

*Corvus corone*

**Common resident breeder**

As with most corvids, this is a species that has adapted well to human expansion, and numbers remain strong. As to be expected, counts tend to be lower than the likes of jackdaw and rook, with a peak count of 43 at Barden Fell Feb 19th.

## Raven

*Corvus corax*

**Resident, uncommon breeder**

A species that has become increasingly well-established in recent years. Primarily seen in counts of up to 5 across our upland areas and along the Washburn, lower level Wharfedale sightings have also been recorded all along the valley Ilkley to East Otley. 9 were recorded at Cray Feb 14th.

## Waxwing

*Bombus garrulus*

**Scarce winter visitor**

As reported in the last view, a flock of 11 were recorded briefly at Knotford Nook 23rd Nov 2022, the first seen in our area since 2019. It looks like winter 2023-4 will be a different story!

## Coal Tit

*Periparus ater*

**Common breeding resident**

Whilst still widely recorded, from Buckden (the only record north of Grass Wood though) to Pool, and throughout the Washburn valley woodlands, highest counts remain on the low side, the most being 10 at Denton Moor Aug 12th. Birds were seen in most reporting gardens.

## Marsh Tit

*Poecile palustris*

**Scarce resident**

The only reported sighting of this species this year was one in an Addingham garden Jun 5th (AEG).

## Willow Tit

*Poecile montanus*

**Scarce resident**

The individual seen regularly in a Menston garden for the past 2 years continued to show itself throughout 2023 at various times, the only record of this species in our area in recent years.

## Blue Tit

*Cyanistes caeruleus*

**Common resident breeder**

Seen throughout all valleys, counts were similar to recent years, with several of 20-40 at the usual high counting Bolton Abbey-Strid Woods. This year's peak was however at Denton Moor, 60+ on Aug 12th. One of the most commonly recorded garden birds, with young observed widely.

## Great Tit

*Parus major*

**Common resident breeder**

Seen equally as widely as Blue Tits (although no reports from Littondale this year), but generally with lower counts, the highest being 10 at the same time and place as the peak Blue Tit count. Reports of young were few.



Skylark, Kettlewell. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Skylark

*Alauda arvensis*

**Common resident breeder / passage migrant**

Earliest of 2023 was as far north as Cray on Valentine's Day, after which there were frequent reports to the end of Q3, with migration watch reports into October. As in 2022, highest count was at Kettlewell (25 in May), with other double digit counts on neighbouring fells. 20 were also recorded at Middleton Moor in mid-Mar.

## Sand Martin

*Riparia riparia*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First sighting was an early Mar 13th at Barden Bridge, with a fortnight's gap to the next at Grassington on the last day of the month. There was then a steady stream of records, with April highs including 80 at BRGP (23rd), and 100+ at OWNRR (28th), both higher than any in 2022. However, there were few others, these including: 30 at Drebley also in Apr; 50 at Kilnsey May 2nd; 25+ at Grassington and Strid Woods later in May. Nesting activity was noted at Kilnsey, Drebley, Appletreewick, Bolton Abbey and Thruscross, whilst 'at least' 70 active nests at BRGP was noted as the highest in memory.



Swallow, Linton. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Swallow

*Hirundo rustica*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First sighting was one at BRGP Mar 20th, followed by single birds at Linton Mills Mar 31st, and at Barden Bridge and Benfoot Brow on Conistone Moor on Apr 3rd. There was then a stream of almost daily sightings from Apr 9th through to mid-Sep (9 at Starbottom on the 16th), after which there were 3 migration watch counts near Stainburn Moor, including 391 on the 22nd, with the last of the year being 16 at adjacent Stainburn Forest. Little nesting was actually reported, whilst higher counts were recorded at OWNRR (30+, Apr 28th), Hubberholme (25, Jul 25th), Kilnsey (30+, Aug 23rd), Weeton (40, Aug 25th) and March Ghyll (100, Aug 28th), with 20+ counts May-Jun at Strid Woods, Buckden, and Low Dam in the Washburn.

## House Martin

*Delichon urbicum*

**Common migrant breeder / passage migrant**

Last of the hirundines to return, first were seen on Apr 23rd at Ben Rhydding and Bolton Abbey, over a week later than the decade average, and the only hirundines to arrive later than in 2022 (by 10 days). Higher counts included 100+ over Ilkley Golf Club (Sep 22nd), 50 at March Ghyll (Jun 29th), 30+ at Kilnsey (Jun 12th), 30 at Pool (Jul 28th), as well as several 30+ counts at Menston. Aside from migration watch, the last were seen on Sep 29th, 25 at BRGP heading upstream. Sightings near Stainburn Moor continued to Oct 11th, peaking with 318 on Sep 22nd. The only records of breeding returned were at Kettlewell and Menston, alongside a late brood seen being fed on Aug 16th at Ben Rhydding.

## Cetti's Warbler

*Cettia cetti*

**Rare passage migrant / summer visitor**

The first record of this species in our area was in 2020, when a bird was briefly heard singing at OWNRR in Apr. One was also heard for the first time at Bradford Ornithological Group's Keighley reserve. Whilst continuing to be heard at Keighley, none were subsequently recorded at Otley until Dec 2022, when a bird was heard on several occasions between Dec 11th and Jan 7th.





Long-Tailed Tit, Ben Rhydding. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Long-Tailed Tit

*Aegithalus caudatus*

**Common resident breeder**

As in previous years, most sightings were along the lower levels of the main Wharfe valley, primarily below Kettlewell, often in gardens, although there was a sighting of one at Buckden in May. On tributaries, there continued to be none from Littondale, whilst Washburn records, more plentiful than last year, stayed focused on woodlands round the reservoirs south of the A59 (although this year there were a couple from Thruscross too). These included our area's highest count, 20+ at Swinsty in Mar and a family party of 10+ at Fewston in Jun. The only other record of young was at Bolton Abbey during the same month.

## Wood Warbler

*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

**Uncommon migrant breeder**

There were five reports of this increasingly scarce species that seems to be hanging on in our area. First was at Fewston Apr 29th, then at Hebers Ghyll May 5th, Barden Bridge May 25th, followed on Jun 12th by 2 at Hebden. The only other was 6 days later at Thruscross.

## Willow Warbler

*Phylloscopus trochilus*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First recorded in our area on Apr 7th at Addingham Moorside, followed 2 days later by one singing on the Chevin – a regular early location. Those at Bolton Abbey and in an Ilkley garden on the 12th were the first of almost daily reports across the full extent of our area until the end of Aug. After that, there were 15 at Denton Moor Sep 9th, and a very late presence at Grassington Oct 10th. A count of 30+ was recorded at Fewston in Jun, and 20+ at each of Strid Woods, Stainburn Forest and Buckden May-Jun.

## Chiffchaff

*Phylloscopus collybita*

**Common migrant breeder; passage / winter visitor**

Whilst widely distributed, this is a predominantly southern species in our area; as previously, there were no records from Littondale, although a few edged north compared to 2022 when none were recorded north of Conistone: one at Kilnsey, others at Kettlewell, and even Buckden in May. Earliest was an overwintering bird reported in a Pool garden in Dec 2022, otherwise the first was reported on Mar 17th from the old railway line at East Otley. Almost all double-digit

counts were in the Washburn valley, including 20+ at Fewston (Apr, Jun), and Low Dam (Jul 5th). Exceptions were Strid Woods (10+, May 30th), Denton Moor (20, Sep 9th), and OOWNR (10-11, Apr-Jul). The last record of the year was at Stainburn Moor Oct 11th.

## Sedge Warbler

*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

**Uncommon, increasingly scarce, migrant breeder**

After two years with 3 sightings each, 2023 saw a rather sparser return, with just a single bird recorded at Scargill May 6th.

## Reed Warbler

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

**Scarce migrant breeder / passage visitor**

OOWNR and High Royds Pond continue to be the only locations for this species. A single bird was heard at the latter on Jun 27th. Up to 8 were heard at Otley from Apr 20th to Aug 10th.

## Grasshopper Warbler

*Locustella naevia*

**Scarce visitor; very occasional breeder**

Up to 3 were heard throughout the late spring and summer at Denton Moor between Apr 28th and Jul 29th. A single bird was also heard at nearby Timble Ings on two occasions during the same period. Elsewhere, 3 were heard at OOWNR Apr 24th, and another at Grimwith May 5th.

## Blackcap

*Sylvia atricapilla*

**Common migrant breeder; passage / winter visitor**

Overwintering birds were recorded at Pool, Menston and Addingham. The first probable returner was seen on Apr 6th at Gallows Hill, another at the Chevin on the 9th. No others were noted until the 15th, after which there was a steady stream of widely distributed records, as far north as Buckden at the end of May, including double-digit counts at Strid Woods in the same month. Frequent sightings continued until the end of Jul, with just 3 subsequent records: Barden Bridge (3, Aug 6th), Blubberhouses (Aug 16th), Denton Moor (4, Sep 9th).

## Garden Warbler

*Sylvia borin*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

Widely reported, as far north as Kettlewell, in ones and twos numbers between Apr 2nd (Farnley) and Jun 26th (Chevin), with two recorded in Jul at Low Dam (5th) and OOWNR (26th).

## Lesser Whitethroat

*Sylvia curruca*

**Scarce migrant / passage visitor**

Two were heard the same day, Apr 28th, one at OOWNR and the other nearby on Green Lane, Otley.

## Whitethroat

*Sylvia communis*

**Increasingly uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First returner was recorded at OOWNR Apr 27th, with all subsequent sightings May-Jun. Unusually, this included a bird as far north as Buckden Jun 16th. Otherwise, locations included Swinsty, Scargill and Stainburn Forest in the Washburn, the Chevin in the south (after a blank in 2022), and Bolton Abbey. All were of single birds.

## Goldcrest

*Regulus regulus*

**Common resident breeder; passage / winter visitor**

A species widely and fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, although with only one record north of Grass Wood this year (3 at Buckden, Jun 16th) and none in Littondale. Most reports were of five or less, a double-digit exception being a count of 10 at Fewston Apr 7th.

## Wren

*Troglodytes troglodytes*

**Common resident breeder**

As befits the UK's most common species, this species is widely (and loudly!) present throughout our area. Not often counted in larger numbers, 20 were noted at Blubberhouses in May and 17 at Strid Woods in Jun. Young were recorded at Timble Ings.

## Nuthatch

*Sitta europaea*

**Common resident breeder**

Birds were seen as far up as Hubberholme and extensively along the valleys southwards, including the Washburn below Fewston. An unusual sighting was one at Thruscross in Mar. Whilst most counts were ones and twos, 10+ were seen at Strid Woods in Jan and at Fewston in Apr. There was direct evidence of breeding at Bolton Abbey and Lindley Wood.

## Treecreeper

*Certhia familiaris*

**Common resident breeder**

Normally only seen south of Grass Wood, birds were recorded in 2023 at Kilnsey (Aug 23rd), Kettlewell (Jan 15th) and Buckden (Jun 16th). Whilst widespread further south, counts rarely exceeded 3, the exceptions being 5 at Strid Woods (May 30th) and 4 at Fewston (Jun 19th).

## Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*

**Common resident breeder**

Whilst this red-listed bird is widely distributed in our area, and recorded as far upstream as Buckden, larger counts do appear to be coming scarcer. The only 3-digit gathering recorded this year was 400 at OOWNR Jan 2nd, the next largest being in the sixties at Weeton in Feb, Swinsty in Mar, and Hebden Beck in Jul, barely worthy of note a few years ago.

## Song Thrush

*Turdus philomelos*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

This species remains one of the most widespread in our area, with records well into the upper valleys, and birds seen frequently in and around southern gardens. One double-digit count was recorded, 10 at Fewston Apr 7th. Young were noted at Linton Mills and the Chevin.

## Mistle Thrush

*Turdus viscivorus*

**Common resident breeder / passage migrant**

Widely and frequently reported with records from Yockenthwaite, Hubberholme and Buckden after a blank north of Kettlewell last year. No significant post-breeding flocks were noted, the only double-digit count being 12 in fields at Swinsty Mar 22nd. The only juveniles noted were at Grimwith.

## Redwing

*Turdus iliacus*

**Common winter visitor**

First of the autumn 2022 returners was one at Grassington Sep 20th. As noted in last year's review, the first count at Weston Moor was 228 on Sep 29th, but all were dwarfed by "an amazing" movement on Oct 19th, when 43000 birds were recorded in the one day. Nothing else came close, the next being 429 on Nov 2nd. Away from here, double digit autumn and early 2023 flocks were noted throughout the south, with a single three figure count (118) at Bolton Abbey Nov 6th. After mid-Feb, 15 were reported at Threshfield Mar 7th, and single birds at OWRN (Mar 15th), Thruscross (17th) and Lindley Wood (Apr 3rd).

## Blackbird

*Turdus merula*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

Perhaps the quintessential garden bird, ubiquitous throughout the lowlands, representing some 4% of all our records. As expected, highest counts were in the winter, with a peak count of 28 at OWRN 25th Nov 2022. Strid Woods saw the largest spring/summer numbers with a series of 15-20 counts May-Jun. 10+ birds were recorded in Ilkley and Menston gardens during the winter.

## Fieldfare

*Turdus pilaris*

**Common winter / passage visitor**

First autumn 2022 sighting was a single bird at Weston Moor watchpoint, with numbers rising to 1027 on Oct 19th and a peak of 1245 on Nov 2nd. Elsewhere, the first sighting was at Threshfield (6, Oct 9th) with flocks of 200+ at Timble Ings-Denton Moor on Oct 19th and 30th. Numbers at Threshfield increased to 60+ in Dec and 100+ in Jan. Other larger counts were at Scargill (c90, Mar 24th), Addingham Moorside (120, Apr 7th), and Addingham Low Moor (60+, Apr 12th), the latter the penultimate record of the winter, the last being at Denton Apr 15th.

## Ring Ouzel

*Turdus torquatus*

**Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

After the high of 2022, the number of locations was down to those of previous recent years. Earliest returners recorded this year were on Apr 2nd at Ilkley Moor, and the day after at Hebden Beck, the only count of more than 2 birds (3). There was a regular series of records from the latter and Conistone Moor, whilst single or occasional sightings were reported from Pen-y-Ghent (Apr 18th), Barden Moor (May 8th) and, last of the year, Dowber Gill (Sep 9th).

## Spotted Flycatcher

*Muscicapa striata*

**Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

Earliest arrivals were once again in the Bolton Abbey area, the first on Apr 23rd. All counts of more than 3 birds - bar one - were here too, up to 8 (Jun 10th). Elsewhere, none were seen until May 20th at Grass Wood, with the highest count at Burnsall (8, Jul 6th), and records north along the valley as far as Hubberholme including regular sightings at Threshfield. In the Washburn, there were sightings from Low Dam through Fewston to Stainburn Forest, whilst, in the main valley, records were limited to several of single birds on the Denton Estate, including the last on Aug 27th, and two at Weeton on Aug 25th.

## Robin

*Erithacus rubecula*

**Common resident breeder / winter visitor**

The archetypal garden bird, familiarity making it liable to significant under-reporting. Highest counts at Strid Woods (15-20, May-Jun) and Fewston (20+, Apr 7th) are almost certainly under-representative.

## Pied Flycatcher

*Ficedula hypoleuca*

**Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

Woodlands between Bolton Abbey and Burnsall, and along the Washburn, continue to be the main strongholds, although there were few reports from the latter this year, although 5 pairs were recorded nesting in boxes at Low Dam in Jun. However, the first record was from Swinsty Apr 16th, with the first at Bolton Abbey two days later. Several double-digit counts were recorded at the latter until the last sighting there on Jun 14th. Outside these areas, two were reported at Grass Wood May 20th, and single birds at Denton Moor May 21st and Jul 5th, the penultimate sighting of the year. An unusual record of a single bird at Grimwith was the last, on Aug 10th.

## Black Redstart

*Phoenicurus ochruros*

**Scarce passage visitor**

Following on from the individual reported near Scargill at the end of 2022 Q3, the first since 2015, another individual was reported from Kilnsey May 22nd.

## Redstart

*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

A single bird on Apr 12th was both the first of the year in our area, and the first of a series of sightings throughout April at Bolton Abbey; the only other locations this month were individuals at Bastow Wood on the 16th, and Fewston and John O'Gaunts on the 30th. May saw almost daily sightings on the Devonshire Estates, more infrequently in the Washburn and further north to Kettlewell, 13 there on Jun 6th, and Hubberholme. To the south, individuals were seen in and around the Denton Estate May-Jun. Last of the year was an outlying Weeton sighting near Almscliff Crag, Aug 25th.

## Whinchat

*Saxicola rubetra*

**Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor**

First of the year was at Kettlewell May 3rd, followed by another 10 days later on Conistone Moor. Furthest north was an individual at Beckermonds Jun 25th, whilst most southerly was the last of the year at Timble Ings Aug 28th.



Juvenile Stonechat, Kex Gill. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Stonechat

*Saxicola torquata*

**Resident breeder; passage / winter visitor**

Seen in every month of the year, there were unusually no records returned this year from north of Kilnsey. Otherwise, sightings were widespread. Almost all counts were in single digits but, as last year, there was an exceptional 17 recorded at Denton Moor, Sep 9th, only one day different to last year. Young were again reported from Grimwith, and also from Mossy Moor.

## Wheatear

*Oenanthe oenanthe*

**Common migrant breeder / passage visitor**

A species seen primarily on the high ground both sides of the Wharfe valley down to the A65, and at Addingham Moorside and Sandwith Moor in the south. First was at Yarnbury Mar 18th, the last at Grassington Moor Sep 16th, with a disappointingly low peak of 11 at Hebden Beck Jun 10th. Outside these areas, the only records were of a single bird on Ilkley Moor (Mar 29th) 3 near Lippersley Pike Apr 17th, and a male on Burley Moor (Aug 27th).



## Dipper

*Cinclus cinclus*

### Common resident breeder

Seen along most main water courses, and occasionally on their tributaries, there continued to be few records from more remote sections, most notably Littondale; none were recorded in the Washburn below Swinsty either. Counts were mostly in ones or twos, but 4-7 were recorded a number of times in the Bolton Abbey area; 4 were also recorded at Swinsty in Mar.

## Tree Sparrow

*Passer montanus*

### Resident breeder

There were even fewer records returned for this species than in 2022, almost all focused on resident populations in Addingham, Sun Lane and Menston, all counts 5 or less. The only other locations, with 1-2 birds, were in a Burley garden (Mar 15th), Otley (Green Lane, Apr 11th), Lindley Wood (Jun 6th), Denton (Sep 23rd) and an Ilkley garden (Sep).

## House Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

### Locally common resident breeder

The most commonly recorded species in the annual RSPB Garden Birdwatch, this is perhaps the bird we most take for granted, even though it is now red listed. Colonies abound throughout our settlements, but few are ever reported. Where there is good coverage, as in Addingham, counts show good numbers, but elsewhere, such reports are relatively few and far between, although 24 were seen at Kettlewell in Jan, 30+ at Grassington in Mar, 20+ at Buckden in Jun. Most gardens in the south included counts in single digits or teens. Unusually, there were 3 reports from the Washburn area: one at Timble Ings Feb 14th, 2 at Blubberhouses May 26th, and 9 at Stainburn Forest Jun 1st.

## Dunnock

*Prunella modularis*

### Common resident breeder

Normally recorded throughout our area, there were no reports this year from Littondale or Upper Wharfedale, other than one sighting at Buckden in Jun. Otherwise, records were widely spread, many from gardens, counts almost always in ones or twos. Highest count was 5 at Weeton in Feb. A fight to the death between two birds was witnessed in an Ilkley garden in Mar.

## Yellow Wagtail

*Motacilla flava*

### Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor

More records of this uncommon species than normal were returned in 2023, with a concentration to the east of Beamsley Beacon. First of the year was an individual at Burnsall Mar 19th, followed by one at Lippersley Pike Apr 17th, and another at Barden Apr 25th. The first of several sightings running through to Sep 3rd of up to 6 birds at March Ghyll was recorded on Jun 29th, with one seen nearby at Langbar Aug 9th and 6 on the edge of Middleton Moor the next day. Another productive location in

recent years, fields east of Otley, produced sightings of up to 3 birds both north and south of the river in May and June.

## Grey Wagtail

*Motacilla cinerea*

### Common resident breeder / winter visitor

Recorded pretty much everywhere there is water, the main gaps in the records this year were along the Skirfare and north of Kettlewell. As in previous years, all double-digit counts were between Burnsall and Bolton Bridges Apr-Jul, with c20 recorded at both Burnsall and Strid Woods. Young were noted at Kettlewell, Linton Mills, Barden Bridge, Strid Woods and Bolton Abbey.

## Pied Wagtail

*Motacilla alba*

### Common resident breeder / passage migrant / winter visitor

Widespread along the valleys, with a series of highest counts at March Ghyll in Aug, up to 29. 26 were also recorded at BRGP early on in Mar. 18 were also recorded at Barden Moor on the last day of Q3, and 15 at Strid Woods in Jun. Young were noted at Kettlewell, Threshfield, Beamsley and Addingham.



Meadow Pipit. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Meadow Pipit

*Anthus pratensis*

### Common resident / migrant breeder / passage visitor

A bird almost entirely of our uplands, recorded widely, and unusually in every month of the year, with as many as 21 at Thorpe as early as Jan 17th. Largest counts, excluding migration watches, included Middleton Moor (40, Mar 18th), Stainburn Forest (40+, Jun 1st), Kettlewell (63, Jun 6th), Ilkley Moor (40+, Jun 13th). Numbers rose substantially into Sep, with 103 at Scargill on the 8th, 430 at Denton Moor on the 23rd, and 2042 on Barden Moor on the 30th. The Stainburn Moor watchpoint recorded a peak of 5879 Sep 22nd, with 1000+ on the 29th and 30th too. Last records of the migration season were on Oct 12th at both Barden Bridge (2) and Stainburn Moor (6).

## Tree Pipit

*Anthus trivialis*

### Uncommon migrant breeder / passage visitor

First sighting was at Stainburn Forest Apr 16th, the location for regular records until Jun 29th. Another was seen at OWNRR Apr 24th, otherwise the bulk of sightings were May-Jun along the Wharfe valley, mostly in the Grass Wood/Grassington area, but as far north as

Greenfield and Hubberholme and south to Bolton Abbey. All were of 4 or fewer, other than 10 reported near Buckden Jun 16th. Into Jul-Aug the only reports were of individuals further south at Denton Moor Jul 5th, and Rivock Edge Aug 6th, the last record alongside another the same day at Grass Wood.

## Rock Pipit

*Anthus petrosus*

### Rare passage visitor

As reported in the last review, one individual was recorded flying west over Denton Moor 13th Oct 2022.

## Chaffinch

*Fringilla coelebs*

### Common resident breeder; passage/winter visitor

With numbers down nationally by one-third in the past decade, mainly due to trichomonosis, this is another species that has been added to the red list in the past couple of years. It remains widespread throughout our lowland areas, regularly seen in gardens, although count numbers do seem to be edging down, and there appear to be none of the large finch flocks we used to see. Larger counts included 36 at Grass Wood (Feb 2nd), 20+ at Strid Wood (Apr 18th, Jun 5th), Stainburn Forest (Jun 1st) and Buckden (Jun 16th), and 48 at Barden Moor (Sep 30th). There was a steady stream over the watchpoint near Stainburn Moor in Sep-Oct, well into double digits most days, peaking at 60 Sep 22nd, and ending Oct 13th.

## Brambling

*Fringilla montifringilla*

### Uncommon winter visitor

First of autumn 2022 was at Weston Moor Sep 30th, where there were 4 other counts of up to 11 in Oct-Nov. Otherwise, most sightings were at Timble Ings with up to 6 birds seen. Largest autumn count was 12 at Denton Moor Nov 27th; other locations (1-2 birds) included Yarnbury, BRGP and Threshfield. Into 2023, an exceptional 50 were seen roosting at Timble Ings in Feb, another 10+ at Swinsty Mar 22nd. All other Q1 counts were in ones and twos, at Bolton Abbey, Barden Moor, Addingham, Ilkley and Fewston, finished off by the year's most northerly record at Oughtershaw Apr 1st.

## Bullfinch

*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

### Common resident breeder

Very much a species of the main valley south of the A59. Grass Wood continued to be the northernmost location for this species, 2 birds seen in Jan and Aug. Other northerly records were at Threshfield, Grassington and Grimwith, and a handful from Bolton Abbey-Strid Woods Jan-May. Similarly, there were just 4 sightings in the Washburn valley, at Sandwith Moor (3, Dec 17th), Timble Ings (May 20th) and Low Dam (Jun 22nd, Jul 5th). Otherwise, birds were recorded widely, including numerous gardens, with up to 6 in Pool throughout Q3.



Greenfinch. Credit: Christopher Accom

## Greenfinch

*Chloris chloris*

**Common resident breeder; passage / winter visitor**

National numbers for this vulnerable species are apparently picking up again after the depredations of trichomonosis, and certainly records in our area have improved over the past couple of years. They are also well spread geographically, at least along the main valley, with sightings from Pool to Buckden, including garden sightings in most main settlements south of Bolton Bridge, 8 on one occasion in Addingham. The species remains scarce in the Washburn with 4 sightings at 3 locations: Thruscross (Mar), Timble Ings (May) and Scargill (May, Aug), and was unrecorded in Littondale this year.

## Twite

*Carduelis flavirostris*

**Scarce passage migrant / visitor**

A single bird was recorded at Sandwith Moor 7th Dec 2022 (another having been seen there in Sep).

## Linnet

*Linaria cannabina*

Uncommon migrant breeder / passage migrant  
A large flock of 150+ below Swinsty Dam was both the largest and first record of the year. A smaller single digit flock was mobile on the western slopes of the Chevin above Menston at the end of Mar. May 1st saw the first of a series of sightings of up to 4 birds at Scargill into Jul, and 6 in Sep. Furthest north were sightings at Yarnbury and Mossy Moor in Jul. March Ghyll had multiple records throughout Aug-Sep, including one count of 12. There were also 5 at nearby Denton Jul 29th. Furthest south were 7 at Weeton at the end of Aug. Other one-off reports also came from Barden Moor (2) and Low Dam (5) in Jun. Frequent counts were recorded during autumn migration, peaking with 114 seen near Stainburn Moor Sep 10th, continuing into mid-Oct (including 92 on the 11th).

## Common Redpoll

*Acanthis flammea*

**Scarce passage / winter visitor**

One of this species was caught and ringed at Timble Ings Feb 11th.



Lesser Redpoll, Ben Rhydding. Credit: Kevin Smith

## Lesser Redpoll

*Acanthis cabaret*

**Resident breeder; passage / winter visitor**

After the large Nov 2022 counts reported in the last review, winter counts were largely limited to 1-4 birds, although 20+ were seen at Bolton Abbey (Jan 11th), 26 at Stainburn Forest (Feb 26th), and up to 5 in an Ilkley garden Feb (and into Jul). Records picked up in March, and there was a steady stream of largely single digit sightings mainly in the north, Bolton Abbey and Washburn areas, including 30+ at Timble Ings Apr 1st and 18 at Grimwith on the 27th. A series of records of 1-3 birds at Denton in Jul was the exception to this. Sep-Oct saw much larger numbers passing through, with up to 200 seen at both Denton (Sep 23rd) and Stainburn (Oct 4th) Moors.

## Crossbill

*Laxia curvirostra*

**Uncommon passage / winter visitor; occasional resident and breeder**

Whilst most sightings were in the Washburn valley, as ever, there were more records from other areas this year than usual. Timble Ings yet again produced the bulk of those Washburn records, up to 20 at a time, along with adjacent Beecroft Plantation, where sightings were recorded on every visit during a mapping project through Jul and Aug. The highest count was at Thruscross (30+, Jun 2022). Beyond the Washburn, there were a number of sightings at Denton Moor, with 2 in Jan followed by a series of records of up to 12 birds in Q3. Other locations included Oughtershaw (3, Apr), Kettlewell (6, Jun), and Addingham Moorside (2, Aug). Counts of up to 17 were recorded at the Stainburn Moor watchpoint through Sep into mid-Oct.

## Goldfinch

*Carduelis carduelis*

**Common resident breeder / passage visitor**

A species that continues to thrive with numerous sightings in all regions and reporting gardens. Autumn-winter counts were generally low, with largest noted being a flock of 20+ over a Menston garden, and spring-summer counts were largely single digit too, although 30+ were seen in an Otley garden in Mar, 20+ were counted at Buckden in May and Jun, c20 at Strid Woods in May, and 30+ at Kilnsey in Aug. As would be expected, numbers picked up into Sep, with 50 at Starbottom, 40 at Grassington, and a regular flow through Stainburn Moor, peaking at 119 Oct 11th.

## Siskin

*Spinus spinus*

**Resident breeder; passage / winter visitor**

Larger winter flocks were recorded at Hebers Ghyll (80, Dec 8th), Barden Fell (150, Feb 14th), and Norwood Bottom (40, Feb 22nd), and into the spring, with 50+ at Swinsty Mar 22nd. Subsequent records through to late Aug were all in single digits and widely spread; young were seen at Scargill. Numbers on autumn migration seen over the Washburn moors peaked at 451 Sep 22nd, with several 100+ counts into Oct.



Snow Bunting, Filey. Credit: Ian Watt

## Snow Bunting

*Plectrophenax nivalis*

**Scarce passage / winter visitor**

There were sightings of an individual near Timble Ings, at Ellacarr Pike, 31st Oct 2022 and 20th Nov 2022. Another was also recorded at nearby Crow Well Jan 21st.

## Yellowhammer

*Emberiza citrinella*

**Scarce resident; probable breeder**

A small population in the Weeton area continues to sustain the presence of this species in our area, with up to 4 birds intermittently recorded throughout the year. 2 were also seen from the Stainburn Moor watchpoint Sep 18th.

## Reed Bunting

*Emberiza schoeniclus*

**Resident breeder / passage visitor**

Northern counts of 1-2 birds were recorded at Kilnsey, Grassington, Burnsall, Grimwith and Mossy Moor, all Mar-Jul. There were just 2 sightings again in the Bolton Abbey area, of 1-2 birds at Barden Moor in the first week of May. Washburn records came mostly from at Scargill with up to 3 birds May-Sep, but there were also 4 at Stainburn Forest in Jun, and individuals at Thruscross (Mar) and Low Dam (Jul). In the main valley, 10 were seen at OWNRR in Dec 2022, and also on Denton Moor in Sep, with other records from Ilkley Moor (May) and Menston High Royds (Jan, May), and a male in an Otley garden (Mar 31st).



# Butterflies

Nyree Fearnley and Paul Millard

In a way it's been a strange year. Almost everyone that I have spoken to thinks that 2023 was a bad year for butterflies, with many people who send me records commenting on how few butterflies they have seen, particularly in their gardens. And our total number of reports seems to confirm this with slightly fewer than in 2022, which in itself was a poor year. However, Nick Hall, transect co-ordinator for Yorkshire says that it has been a good year. Both myself and Paul have thought that the numbers of butterflies were noticeably lower, yet 6 of our species certainly had a good year, some are relatively stable, and some are recorded in such low numbers each year that it's difficult to make meaningful comparisons, such as Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks. So, thankfully, it is by no means all bad news, and it also shows how important records are to get a true picture.

## Summary. The ups

Brimstone continues to do well with increases in reports and individuals.

Comma was also up on both number of reports and individuals.

Holly Blue was slightly down on 2022, but remains well up on the 10 year average.

Orange-tip had a much better year than 2022, and is well up on the 10 year average.

Scotch Argus is doing well with increases in reports and individuals.

Wall continues to do well in Wharfedale, despite apparent decreases in other areas of the UK, with increases in reports and individuals.

## The downs

Small Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Ringlet, and Small Tortoiseshell, all remain well down on the 10 year average, although Large White showed a slight increase from 2022.

Painted Lady had a very bad year, but as this species relies on adults making it here as immigrants, it usually only has a spectacular year about every 10 years, making the other years look bad.

## Best places to see butterflies – Locations of peak counts

### Site - Butterfly peak count

- Park Rash, Kettlewell - Dingy Skipper
- Bown Scar, Littondale - Small Skipper
- Timble Ings - Large Skipper
- Barden Bridge to Drebley - Orange-tip
- Sun Lane NR - Small White, Brimstone, Wall,
- Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma
- Skyreholme - Green-veined White
- Otley Wetlands NR - Speckled Wood, Ringlet, Gatekeeper
- Kilnsey - Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Dark Green Fritillary, Northern Brown Argus
- Scargill House, Kettlewell (private) & Bastow Wood - Scotch Argus
- Hebden - Painted Lady
- Addingham - Small Tortoiseshell
- Hoodstorth to Thruscross - Small Copper
- Burley & Lindley - Purple Hairstreak, Holly Blue
- Otley Chevin - Green Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak
- Lindley Reservoir - Common Blue

## 2023 in detail

As always, our analysis is based on records we receive, and influenced by a number of factors. For example, if people no longer visit a site, visit less frequently, or don't send in records, then consequently numbers will be down. Our recording system is not scientific, but it does give us an **indication** of what is happening in our countryside and continues to be extremely valuable for this reason. In particular, our records may be used to assist the opposition of proposals for the development of wildlife rich land in our area. All WNS butterfly records are also sent to the VC Recorder, and they are all entered onto a National Database, which is often used in collaboration with data from other wildlife organisations. So by sending in your records you are helping all wildlife, and not just in your local area, but nationally too.

I think that it is worth mentioning the fact that more and more people are now submitting records directly to on-line recording schemes, such as iRecord, Big Butterfly Count, and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS). Unless someone also sends these records in separately to us, then we have no knowledge of them. So there are undoubtedly butterfly records for our area that we never know about, which has only recently become more of an issue. These schemes are all excellent, as they encourage members of the public to look for, and record butterflies, and they also have the advantage of being sent to the VC Recorders, and so become part of the National Database. If anyone does use an on-line recording scheme, but would also like to send in their records to myself or Paul, then please tell us that you have sent them in to iRecord, etc. We then mark them as duplicates on our Master Spreadsheet, so that the VC Recorder is aware that they will have received them already.

We received 2320 records this year compared to 2400 in 2022, which in itself was a bad year. Most years since 2003 have had more than 3000 records, with the peak year being 2006 with 5051 records, more than double this year. However, as usual, some species did have a good year, and more detail can be seen in the individual species reports. The 10 year average for total number of reports is 31.8% DOWN, and for the number of individuals is 47.2% DOWN.

Historically we receive a lot more reports from lower down the Dale. Generally speaking, we

class the Upper Dale as anywhere from Barden Bridge upwards, into both Wharfedale and Littondale, so it would be great if anyone is out walking in more northern / remote areas and can send us records of any butterflies that you see. We receive even fewer records from the very lowest part of our area, between Pool-in-Wharfedale, and Rougemont, as this too, is an area that few people seem to visit.

## Transects (UKBMS)

These are fixed routes that are walked at regular intervals, and there are three different kinds. The idea is to get consistent data over a long period of time, to help look for long term trends in butterfly and moth populations and distributions, and also flight periods, which can tell us a lot about things such as climate change. Full transects are walked once a week for 26 weeks from the 01 April until the 30 September and all species of butterfly and moths are recorded.

Species only transects are walked once a week during the normal flight period for the species that is being targeted, but all species of butterfly and moth are recorded.

A Wider Countryside Butterfly Square (WCBS) is a 1km square selected at random that is walked once a month in July and August, with the option to add a walk in May or June as well. All species of butterfly and moth are recorded. The WNS recording area has examples of all three, but as all the data is entered directly onto a Butterfly Conservation database on-line the records don't automatically come to Paul or myself. The exceptions are the ones that Paul, myself and David walk, David and I walk a full transect at Sun Lane NR, Burley, along with Janet Kyriakides. In 2023 it was interesting to note that two of our Nature Reserves, Grass Wood, and Sun Lane, came 5th and 6th respectively out of all the butterfly Transects in Yorkshire. Nick Hall, transect co-ordinator for Yorkshire has noticed that sites with some shelter, such as woodland, or hedges, fared better than more open sites which dried out during the dry weather. Sun Lane NR was also the best site for peak counts with the peak count for 6 species. For a small reserve it is wonderful, with a fabulous array of flowers too, which usually means a site good for butterflies too.

## Individual species reports

Details of individual species follow. For each species the common name is followed by the Latin name. The first reference number is that of the old Bradley Fletcher numbering system which has now been replaced by the Aggasiz numbering system (figures in brackets). The number of records in 2023 is compared with the average of the TEN previous years, and the percentage change is given. For the number of sites we now use 1km grid squares, so larger sites may cover more than one 1km square. An example is Scotch Argus, which is present at 5 sites, but at 3 of these they were seen in 2 different 1km squares, so the number of sites is entered as 8. The initials in brackets denote individual observers whose names are at the end of the report. A number of records came in after the report was prepared and are therefore not included. These records will however be added to the WNS database.

## Hesperiidae (Skippers)

**Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* 1532 (57.001)** 1 record, 28.6% DOWN, at 1 site, by 1 observer, on 03 June (IB)

It was looking like 2023 would be another no show year for this elusive butterfly. Then at a celebration event for Grass Wood reaching 40 years as a Nature Reserve I was notified of an observation of ten on the third of June at Park Rash near Kettlewell. They have never been seen this far up the Dale before and it raises some interesting questions. Have we really missed a colony all this time? Have they got there under their own steam? They are after all highly mobile. But I fear that this may have been an unofficial introduction as it is close to one of the sites where Scotch Argus were released a few years ago. This could represent a notable survival response to climate change, but with unofficial releases we can no longer be sure.

**Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* 1526 (57.006)**

41 records, 51.5% DOWN, 29 sites, 9 observers, 151 individuals

**First sighting** 09 June Lower Thruscross Reservoir when 2 were seen (DA)

**Last sighting** 30 Aug Bastow Wood when 1 was seen (NF)

**Peak count** 12 July Littondale when 24 were seen (NF & PM)

I thought that 2022 was a bad year, but this year was even worse in all respects, for this pretty orange butterfly. The numbers of observers and sites was down. Is it that less people are checking sites? Or are we missing a lot of records due to on-line recording schemes? It is the worst year ever for number of individuals. The only good thing is that they are very widespread across our area, being found in the lower sections of the dale, and right up into Upper Wharfedale and Littondale.

**Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus* 1531 (57.009)** 41 records, 2.8% UP, 22 sites, 9 observers, 91 individuals

**First sighting** 02 June Otley wetlands NR when 1 was seen (PP)

**Last sighting** 07 Aug Skyreholme when 1 was seen (PM)

**Peak count** 06 July Timble Ings when 10 were seen (DA)

Perhaps surprisingly our other orange skipper had a much better year, which took the 10 year average into a positive figure. It was up by 272.7% from 2022, and the number of individuals was up by 282.3%. It is found in the same habitat as Small Skipper, with the caterpillars of both species feeding on a range of grasses. The Large Skipper does fly slightly earlier, although they do overlap. Perhaps the weather in 2022 and Spring of 2023 favoured the earlier flight period of the Large Skipper. Both species overwinter as Caterpillars.

## Pieridae (Whites)

Every year we get people who tell us that they have seen Whites that they haven't been able to identify. Don't worry, none of us can identify all the Whites that we see, but here are a few tips that I hope you will find useful. Firstly, binoculars are a massive help, as Whites tend to be very flighty and you often can't get close to them. I find the underside of the wing easier. Both Large and Small White have a fairly plain yellow colouration, and on the Large White you can often see the bolder black markings of the upperwing showing through. Green-veined White is usually quite strongly marked with a series of veins, as the name suggests. And an Orange-tip female, that doesn't have the very obvious orange markings of the male, has a pretty mottled olive-green pattern.

**Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamine* 1553 (58.003)**

176 records, 7.2% UP, 65 sites, 28 observers, 537 individuals

**First sighting** 04 April Addingham when 5 were seen (JT)

**Last sighting** 14 June Park Rash, Kettlewell when 1 was seen (NF, PM, & RM)

**Peak count** 13 May Barden Bridge to Drebley when 100 were seen (DL)

An excellent year for this lovely Spring butterfly, which I am sure most of you are familiar with, the male at least with its brilliant orange wing patches, clearly visible even in flight. David always says, why aren't all butterflies so easy to identify? It was well up on 2022, in all respects, including the number of individuals seen per report, which eliminates to a certain extent the number of people sending in records. Always a pleasure to see this beautiful butterfly early in the year.

**Large White *Pieris brassicae* 1549 (58.006)** 116 records, 24.2% DOWN, 32 sites, 23 observers, 193 individuals

**First sighting** 14 May Sun Lane NR when 1 was seen (NF)

**Last sighting** 12 Oct Stonelands Wood, Litton when 1 was seen (NF & PM)

**Peak count** 20 July Addingham and 21 Aug Addingham when 7 were seen (JP)

Whilst it was down on the 10 year average, there was a slight increase from 2022. Looking back over the past 24 years it appears to be fairly stable. It was widespread, reaching Starbottin in Wharfedale, and Litton in Littondale, although the majority of records were from the Otley, Burley, Addingham area.

**Small White *Pieris rapae* 1550 (58.007)** 154 records, 36.5% DOWN, 41 sites, 25 observers, 309 individuals

**First sighting** 02 April Burley when 1 was seen (PR)

**Last sighting** 12 Oct Stonelands Wood, Litton when 1 was seen (NF & PM)

**Peak count** 27 July Sun Lane NR when 24 were seen (JK)

It was a poor year for the daintiest of our Whites, it lives in very similar habitats to the Large White. It was down on 2022 by 20.2%, which wasn't a good year either. Its flight period was over a month longer than the Large White, with more September and October records, so I am not sure why it did so much worse.

**Green-veined White *Pieris napi* 1551 (58.008)** 94 records, 57.9% DOWN, 35 sites, 14 observers, 198 individuals

**First sighting** 01 May Burley when 1 was seen (PR)

**Last sighting** 02 Sept Otley when 1 was seen (PP)

**Peak Count** 04 Aug Skyreholme when 10 were seen (PM)

Sadly this butterfly did even worse than the Small White, with numbers of individuals also greatly reduced both on the 10 year average, and from 2022. I think that this is the easiest White to identify if you can get a good look at the underside, with its distinct veins, and it can be quite prolific, especially in damp areas. Again, I don't know why it is doing so badly, unless the very hot, dry weather of 2022 affected its breeding success, so that there were less adults emerging this year.

**Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus* 1545 (58.010)**

No records



**Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni***  
**1546 (58.013)** 82 records, 31.8% UP,  
29 sites, 19 observers,  
130 individuals

**First sighting** 17 March Sun Lane NR  
when 1 was seen (JK)

**Last sighting** 10 Oct Burley  
when 1 was seen (PR)

**Peak count** 25 May Sun Lane NR  
when 8 were seen (JK)

This gorgeous yellow butterfly, often the first species to be seen in Spring, had yet another excellent year. 2022 was a fantastic year, and it is up by 14.4% this year. The number of individuals is up even more both from 2022, by 34.0%, and on the 10 year average, by 50.6%. Perhaps one reason that it is doing so well is that people are planting Buckthorn, and Alder Buckthorn, the foodplants of the caterpillars, to try and encourage this butterfly. A lot of Nature Reserves are doing this. We planted some Buckthorn at Grass Wood in 2022, and it was already present there. Some of the older bushes had caterpillars seen on them this year, so it's definitely working. I actually didn't think that we had seen very many Brimstones this year, so it goes to show the importance of submitting records, where the figures don't lie. And it's even better when it's good news.

## Nymphalidae (Nymphalids – the multi-coloured species plus the browns)

**Wall *Lasiommata megera* 1615**  
**(59.002)** 40 records, 46.0% UP, 27  
sites, 20 observers, 75 individuals

**First sighting** 16 May Otley Wetlands NR  
when 1 was seen (PP)

**Last sighting** 17 Sept Grassington  
when 1 was seen (SWa & GW)

**Peak count** 06 Sept Sun Lane NR  
when 7 were seen (JK)

More good news with this attractive orange / brown butterfly. I believe that nationally it isn't doing too well in a lot of places, and people often say that it is most common close to the coast, and rarer inland. Well, we are certainly bucking the trend here in Wharfedale, as it continues to increase, and we are nowhere near the coast. The figures for individuals are even more impressive than the number of reports, with an increase of 23.0% from 2022, which itself was a very good year, and an increase of 60.9% on the 10 year average. I also think that it is often overlooked, as it is very difficult to identify with certainty in flight. It can pop up anywhere, but we had no records any further north than Bastow Wood, apart from a single butterfly at Sleets Gill in lower Littondale.

**Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria***  
**1614 (59.003)** 208 records, 18.8%  
DOWN, 62 sites, 29 observers,  
821 individuals

**First sighting** 04 April Addingham  
when 1 was seen (JT)

**Last sighting** 07 Oct Sun Lane NR  
when 4 were seen (JK)

**Peak count** 28 Aug Otley Wetlands NR  
when 46 were seen (PP)

This species seems to be fairly stable. Whilst the number of records was down on the 10 year average the number of individuals was slightly up, both on 2022, and on the 10 year average. It was also well up on the number of individuals per record, so that is a good sign that overall numbers are good. Perhaps less people went to the right places, or didn't send in records. We have been hoping that someone could find evidence of them in Upper Wharfedale, as Grass Wood / Bastow Wood has seemed to be the stopping point. But this year we had records from Cross Wood at Starbotton, and Stonelands at Litton. Can anyone find them even further north?

**Small Heath *Coenonympha***  
***pamphilus* 1627 (59.005)**  
55 records, 49.3% DOWN, 30 sites,  
13 observers, 271 individuals

**First sighting** 03 June Burley Moor  
when 1 was seen (RC & JHe)

**Last sighting** 17 Aug Kilnsey and Sleets Gill  
when 3 were seen (PM)

**Peak count** 25 July Kilnsey  
when 27 were seen (PM)

The Small Heath is holding on well in its Upper Wharfedale strongholds. There were good showings with respectable counts on the transects that are walked around Kilnsey. More notable are those seen in Lower Wharfedale, such as Addingham, Stainburn Forest and Otley on the riverside. This used to be a common butterfly throughout the UK. But it has largely disappeared from southern England. Maybe like the Wall, which is also doing well in the uplands the Small Heath is beginning to push back out into its old habitats. It will benefit from more unmanaged grassy areas and lower pesticide use. The newer management strategies for road verges and amenity and public areas might be bearing fruit.

**Scotch Argus *Erebia aethiops***  
**1618 (59.008)** 12 records, 8.1% UP,  
8 sites, 6 observers, 220 individuals

**First sighting** 06 Aug Bastow Wood  
when 4 were seen (PM)

**Last sighting** 30 Aug Bastow Wood  
when 10 were seen (NF)

**Peak count** 10 Aug Kettlewell  
when 97 were seen (NF)

The Scotch Argus is doing well at all five of our known Wharfedale colonies. We had a small work party on private land at Scargill House in June clearing encroaching bracken which will

hopefully improve the fortunes of this re-introduced butterfly. We had a tip that there may be one or two more introduction sites in our area that we have not yet found. The butterfly is very sedentary and takes many years to move a few hundred metres. Do you like a challenge? This August get your hiking boots on and walk the footpaths on the upland limestone grassland. All five of our known colonies are in partially sheltered areas with abundant Blue Moor Grass and an elevation of 200 to 240 metres above sea level.

**Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus***  
**1629 (59.009)** 89 records, 53.5%  
DOWN, 37 sites, 19 observers,  
479 individuals

**First sighting** 12 June Addingham  
when 1 was seen (JT)

**Last sighting** 30 Aug Addingham  
when 1 was seen (IG)

**Peak count** 26 June Otley Wetlands NR  
when 45 were seen (PP)

This species is continuing to decline in our area with even fewer records than 2022. There were only three records from any further up the dale than Kilnsey, a single butterfly at Strans Wood, Yockenthwaite (PM), 3 at Stonelands, Litton (PM), and 9 at Bown Scar, Arncliffe (NF & PM). It does like lush grass, and is known to not do as well after a drought year, so perhaps the hot, dry weather of 2022 came at the wrong time for the caterpillars to survive.

**Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina***  
**1626 (59.010)** 190 records, 14.5%  
DOWN, 65 sites, 26 observers,  
1455 individuals

**First sighting** 09 June Otley Wetlands NR  
when 5 were seen (PP)

**Last sighting** 06 Sept Otley Wetlands NR  
when 14 were seen (PP)

**Peak count** 07 July Kilnsey  
when 72 were seen (PM)

Although it was down on the 10 year average it was 10.5% up from 2022, but the number of individuals was 29.4% down on 2022. However 2022 was an exceptional year for the number of individuals, so this year was still a good year. It is a common grassland butterfly, and it was very widespread across the whole area, being seen much further up Wharfedale than last year, with records from Strans Wood, Yockenthwaite (PM). Last year the furthest north was a record from Kettlewell, although it is almost certain that it was present further north.

**Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus***  
**1625 (59.011)** 25 records, 29.2%  
DOWN, 9 sites, 8 observers,  
83 individuals

**First sighting** 07 July Otley Wetlands NR  
when 1 was seen (PP)

**Last sighting** 28 Aug Otley Wetlands NR  
when 1 was seen (PP)

**Peak count** 28 July Otley Wetlands NR  
when 47 were seen (PP)

It wasn't a good year in our area for this pretty brown butterfly. All records came from Otley and Burley, apart from a record at Stainburn Forest (NF), and a record from Lower Thruscross Reservoir (DA). From 2004 to 2007 it had a run of fantastic years, and then it has gradually tailed off, which is a worry for this nice little butterfly. It is probably under-recorded, as it is quite similar to the Meadow Brown, although the Gatekeeper is significantly smaller. If you get a good close-up view, the Gatekeeper has more spots on the underwing, and on the upperwing there are 2 white spots in the black circle, whereas the Meadow Brown usually only has 1 white spot. Interestingly, on a holiday to the Isle of Wight and Dorset we saw lots of Gatekeepers, and everyone was commenting on what a good year they were having. You would have thought that generally they would be doing better further north with global warming, but of course there are always numerous factors effecting a species.

### Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* 1620 (59.012)

No records

### Dark-green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja* 1607 (59.019) 36 records, 19.8% DOWN, 21 sites, 9 observers, 163 individuals

**First sighting** 14 June Park Rash, Kettlewell when 1 was seen (NF, PM, & RM)

**Last sighting** 17 Aug Sleets Gill when 1 was seen (PM)

**Peak Count** 13 July Kilnsey when 25 were seen (NF & PM)

2023 was an average to poor year for the Dark-green Fritillary, It remains largely a butterfly of our upland areas with regular showings on the transects around Kilnsey. There was just one record outside its usual haunts in Addingham on the 20th of July. I guess conditions were not right for it to be attempting to colonise new areas.

### Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* 1608 (59.017)

No records

### Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* 1590 (59.023) 234 records, 11.3% DOWN, sites, 32 observers, 764 individuals

**First sighting** 08 May Otley when 1 was seen (GH)

**Last sighting** 05 Nov Skyreholme when 1 was seen (PM)

**Peak count** 14 Sept Sun Lane NR and 29 Sept Yockenthwaite when 25 were seen (NF & NB)

The number of records was almost identical to 2022, but the number of individuals was 46.9% up on 2022, so that is brilliant. They seemed to do particularly well later in the year, with any Ivy flowers on a sunny day almost guaranteed to have Red Admiral on them. On 07 Oct a total

of 49 were seen at Denton Park, on a 2.5 hour walk covering different areas (NF). This large, showy butterfly is a migrant, and therefore a strong flier, and it can turn up anywhere. The records were well spread out over all our area.

### Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* 1591 (59.024) 10 records, 88.8% DOWN, 7 sites, 7 observers, 14 individuals

**First sighting** 01 June Burley when 1 was seen (JC)

**Last sighting** 12 Oct Hebden when 3 were seen (RL)

**Peak count** 12 Oct Hebden when 3 were seen (RL)

This is another large, attractive migrant, which can turn up anywhere. Numbers arriving in Britain are dependent on various factors in Europe, such as breeding success, and weather conditions. If the weather is suitable over there, then they will stay and breed, and won't bother flying the extra distance to make it over here. In Britain there is usually a Painted Lady Year approximately every 10 years, and we had one in 2019, which smashed the figures for number of records and number of individuals, as the best year ever in our area. Obviously these spectacular years effect the 10 year averages. This year wasn't a good year, but not the worst that we've ever had.

### Peacock *Aglais io* 1597 (59.026) 160 records, 47.9% DOWN, 60 sites, 28 observers, 288 individuals

**First sighting** 18 March Burley when 1 was seen (DA)

**Last sighting** 12 Oct Addingham when 1 was seen (PB)

**Peak count** 08 Aug Sun Lane NR when 20 were seen (JK)

This beautiful butterfly was marginally up on 2022, and it was very widespread, but it was its third worst year. For a species whose caterpillars feed on Nettles you would expect it to be doing well, but there are obviously other factors that don't suit it. Some Nettles may be sprayed with herbicides, or chopped down, but there are certainly plenty of healthy Nettles around. There were 2 records of caterpillars on Nettles, at Timble Ings (NF), and Weybecks Pasture, Littondale (MC), both of good numbers.

### Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urtica* 1593 (59.027) 135 records, 65.3% DOWN, 50 sites, 27 observers, 232 individuals

**First sighting** 02 Feb Otley when 1 was seen (JP)

**Last sighting** 03 Nov Grassington when 1 was seen (NF)

**Peak count** 03 Aug Addingham when 16 were seen (DM)

A terrible year for one of our common butterflies, that most people are familiar with. I have to go back as far as 2001 to find a worse year. Lots of people commented on how few

of them they had seen. And, like the Peacock, its caterpillars feed on Nettles. So it's hard to think of a good reason why they are struggling so much. Both species overwinter as adults. Is something effecting their survival over the winter, such as milder weather awakening them before they are able to find a mate and breed? If they wake up in the middle of winter then there will be no nectar sources, and the weather will most likely be unsuitable for them to survive very long at all.

### Comma *Polygonia c-album* 1598 (59.031) 147 records, 4.0% UP, 40 sites, 18 observers, 259 individuals

**First sighting** 19 March Middleton Wood, Ilkley when 1 was seen (NF)

**Last sighting** 05 Nov Skyreholme when 1 was seen (PM)

**Peak count** 18 July and 08 Aug Sun Lane NR when 11 were seen (DA & JK)

Some good news for this bright orange butterfly. Although only slightly up on the 10 year average it had a much better year than in 2022, for both the number of records and the number of individuals. Whilst it is great that it is doing well in recent years every year from 2003 to 2011 had more records, and those years are now far enough back that they are not taken into account in the 10 year average. Last year the furthest up the dale was at Skyreholme, and I commented that it would be nice to have some records from further up the dale. And we did. 1 was seen at Threshfield Quarry (NF), and 2 were seen at Yockenthwaite (NB). It is a species that is spreading north with climate change. A few years ago, it was extremely rare in Scotland, and now it has been recorded in the far north. This is another butterfly that overwinters as an adult, and whose caterpillars have a preference for Nettles, so why is this doing so much better than the Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell?

## Lycaenidae (Blues and Hairstreaks)

### Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* 1561 (61.001) 40 records, 38.0% DOWN, 20 sites, 13 observers, 82 individuals

**First sighting** 23 May Lower Barden Reservoir when 1 was seen (PM)

**Last sighting** 05 Sept Hoodstorth to Thruscross when 14 were seen (DA)

**Peak count** 14 Oct Farnley when 1 was seen (NF)

This exquisite little butterfly fared worse than last year in all respects, but that was a fairly good year for it. The first sighting was almost a month later, and the last sighting around 3 weeks earlier, so it had a much shorter flight period. It's a butterfly that can pop up anywhere, usually associated with grassland, even with quite tall grasses. The caterpillar foodplant is Sorrel. Later in the year it is always worth checking on Ragwort flowers as it seems to like to nectar on those. It is a small butterfly,



and can be tricky to spot. In flight it could be confused with Small or Large Skipper, as they are a similar size, and also orange coloured, but when perched the Small Copper has dark spots, and brown areas which are unmistakable.

**Purple Hairstreak *Favonius quercus* 1557 (61.004) 3 records, 75.0% DOWN, 2 sites, 2 observers, 3 individuals**

**First sighting** 07 July Burley when 1 was seen (PR)

**Last sighting** 15 Aug Burley when 1 was seen (PR)

**Peak count** 07 July Burley, 25 July Lindley, and 15 Aug Burley when 1 was seen each time (PR & MC)

Most years we only get single figures of this elusive butterfly. It is even more difficult to spot than the White-letter Hairstreak, as it rarely comes down to the ground. I have never seen one nectaring, but they do occasionally land on the ground. Although it is well down on the 10 year average it had a spectacular year in 2021 when we received 59 records. This was mainly due to the efforts of one couple who went out specifically looking for this species. It lives in the top of Oak trees, and the best time to look is on a warm summer's evening. Binoculars are definitely needed for this species.

**Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* 1555 (61.005) 22 records, 61.7% DOWN, 15 sites, 7 observers, 153 individuals**

**First sighting** 15 April Otley Chevin when 2 were seen (NF)

**Last sighting** 19 June Scargill House, Kettlewell when 1 was seen (NF & PM)

**Peak count** 18 April Otley Chevin when 42 were seen (NF)

The number of records was slightly up on 2022, but this jewel of a butterfly seems to be struggling. I only have to go back to 2020 though to find a good year. As it emerges quite early in the year, and it only has a single brood it must surely be affected by the weather. I can remember that the past 2 years we have been looking for them on Burley and Ilkley Moors, and it has been cold and windy. Even if there have been more present than we have seen, poor weather must hamper their efforts to breed. Let's hope for more suitable weather for them in 2024, they are our only bright green butterfly, and exquisite close up.

**White-Letter Hairstreak *Satyrus w-album* 1558 (61.006)**

1 record, 95.2% DOWN, 1 site, 1 observer, 1 individual

We had just the one record from Otley Chevin (MC). In the past we have had some much better years, the best being 2014 when 58 records were received, and we have had numerous years of double figures. Have they really declined so much? Or are there not as

many people looking for them? You need to look in the tops of Elm trees, although they do come down to nectar. They can also be tricky to identify, being mostly brown, and quite small. Binoculars are almost a must for this species. So perhaps some simply go unnoticed? We would be very grateful if people can keep an eye out for them, as it would be good to confirm them in a few more places.

**Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* 1580 (61.012) 111 records, 66.7% UP, 25 sites, 29 observers, 154 individuals**

**First sighting** 04 April Addingham when 1 was seen (JT)

**Last sighting** 21 Sept Burley when 1 was seen (BS)

**Peak count** There were 7 occasions when 3 were seen, 5 occasions in Burley (PR & SB), and 2 occasions in Otley (DO)

This gorgeous butterfly continues to do well in our area. This species has a relationship with a parasitic wasp, and some people believe that it runs on a 5 year cycle. So if it has a good year then it will tail off for a couple of years, and then start to increase again for a couple of years, to reach a peak year again, and so on. Looking at our data it seems to have 2 good years, then 2 poorer years, then back to 2 good years. The figures for number of records for the past 6 years are as follows; 2018 - 132, 2019 - 139, 2020 - 34, 2021 - 60, 2022 - 123, 2023 - 111. The first year that we had over 100 records was 2018. It's a lovely butterfly, and if you see a blue butterfly in your garden, or a more urban setting, then it will almost certainly be a Holly Blue, but it also occurs anywhere where Holly and Ivy are present. Otley, Burley, and Addingham all had numerous records. The furthest up the dale that it was seen was at Grassington (CA). It would be nice to find some further up, or in Littondale.

**Northern Brown Argus *Arctia* 1573 (61.016) 37 records, 15.3% DOWN, 17 sites, 5 observers, 210 individuals**

**First sighting** 05 June Kilnsey and Trollers Gill when 24 were seen in total (PM)

**Last sighting** 13 July Sleets Gill when 1 was seen (NF & PM)

**Peak count** 13 June Kilnsey when 23 were seen (PM)

Once again there were no Brown Argus records within our recording area so our important colonies of Northern Brown Argus remain secure from cross contamination and recording confusion. This butterfly is an upland specialist that feeds in the larval stage exclusively on Common Rockrose. Our colonies are proving to be important within the National context as they are doing reasonably well despite being at the southern edge of its distribution. Butterfly Conservation have identified it as a species of concern as it is threatened both by its cousin the Brown Argus which has a wider range of

larval foodplant and the change in the climate. Because of this anxiety we made a special effort to find it in under recorded locations where it has been seen in the past. Thankfully within Wharfedale we found it to be present in all the areas where we expected it to be. This is not so in Wensleydale and Swaledale where two colonies may have been lost due to respectively, intense rabbit grazing or overgrowth of scrub. The butterfly likes limestone pavement with plenty of Rockrose which is lightly grazed. Cattle grazing by hardy breeds such as the Belted Galloway seem to be superior to sheep as they do not graze the herb layer so closely, thereby allowing the caterpillars to complete their life cycles. The National Parks are promoting this management and the butterfly is benefiting as a result.

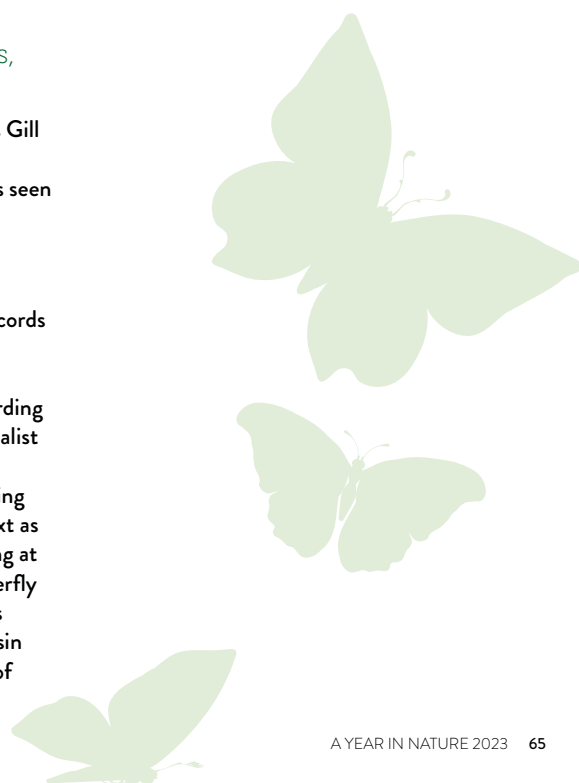
**Common Blue *Polyommatus Icarus* 1574 (61.018) 59 records, 20.2% DOWN, 26 sites, 13 observers, 215 individuals**

**First sighting** 27 May Otley Wetlands NR when 2 were seen (PP)

**Last sighting** 31 Aug Addingham when 2 were seen (MD)

**Peak count** 02 Jun2 Lindley Reservoir when 48 were seen (NF)

This species is relatively stable over the past 9 years. But prior to that we had more records and more individuals in most years, with 2003 to 2006 being exceptionally good. The average for the number of individuals over these 4 years was 2775, so over 10 times this year's total. However, most years we get records from Duck Street Quarry, a private quarry at Greenhow, which can easily produce counts of around 400 – 500 on a single visit. This year we had no records from there. It can be found anywhere with a reasonable amount of Bird's-foot Trefoil, and is quite widespread in our area, being found at Otley Wetlands NR, Sun Lane NR, the Washburn Valley, and in numerous places higher up both Wharfedale and Littondale.





## Finally

Firstly, we would like to say a massive thank you to everyone who has sent us records this year. All records are very welcome, as the more that we receive the better the overall picture we can get of our area. All species are important, as something that is common today may not be in a few years' time, or it may have moved in distribution. This is really useful in looking at longer term trends for all species, both in the numbers seen, the distribution changes, and the flight periods. The flight period shows us if a species is flying for longer, and also if they are emerging earlier / being seen later than usual. As all the WNS butterfly records are sent on to the VC recorder, and are then entered onto a national database where they can be useful in so many ways, obtaining grants for conservation bodies / farmers, reviewing planning applications, monitoring climate change and biodiversity, and looking at butterfly populations and distributions nationally, to name just a few. It's very easy to send us your records. We have an excel spreadsheet that I can send you if you just send me an email, you can use a spreadsheet of your own, ideally excel, send me the details in an email or a text if there are not too many, or written records, are all gratefully accepted. I am also very happy for people to send me photos for ID help.

All that we need is your name, where you saw it (ideally with a grid reference), date, what species, and how many (please make an educated guess if you aren't sure of the exact number).

For your records to be included in this report, and also the Yorkshire BC report, then we need them by the end of October, as we have to send the records to the VC Recorder in early November. Most butterflies are finished by then anyway, and don't worry if you see any after that. Please just send them in, and they will still be added to the WNS database, and sent to the VC Recorder.

Watching and recording butterflies should bring huge pleasure. You don't need to worry about identifying every one (we certainly can't), and some people just send in occasional records, perhaps a species that they think is rarer, or in an unusual or remote place, or in exceptionally large numbers. We have a huge amount of fun going to places looking for butterflies, and when you see something in a new place, or just see lots of different species, it is such a delight. Hopefully the sun is shining, and usually there are pretty flowers too. We have some incredible sites in our area. A few examples of good places to go are Sun Lane NR, Stainburn Forest, Timble Ings, Threshfield Quarry, Bastow Wood, and the high-level path between Yockentwaite and Cray, through Strans Wood. Please feel free to contact me if you want any information on where or when to see a particular species, and I will do my best to help.

Good luck with butterfly hunting in 2024. I hope that you get to some fantastic sites, and see not just butterflies, but all sorts of other wildlife too, as we do. It brings us great joy, and I hope that it does you too.

Nyree Fearnley, and Paul Millard  
Butterfly Recorders 2023.

## Observers

Records were received from the following people: Ablett, Clare (Cab); Smith, Aidan (AS); Alder, Chris (CA); Allen, Sonia (SAI); Alred, David, & Joan (DA); Barrett, Neil (NB); Batterby, Rick (RB); Barton, Susan (SB); Blomfield, Ian (IB); Breen, Patricia (PB); Burns, Peter & Janet (PJB); Burrow, Dick & Heather (DB); Cavanagh, Rachel (RC); Clerk, Mike & Joyce (MC); Croft, Jan (JC); Dunne, Mick (MD); Fearnley, David & Nyree (NF); Grainger, Anthony & Rita (AGr); Gramshaw, Audrey (AG); Grant, Ian & Susan (IG); Grimshaw, C (CG); Hart, Gilly (GHa); Haycock, Gordon (GH); Healey, John (JHe); Hindle, Jan (JH); Horner, Fred & Carmen (CH); Jakeways, Diana (DJ); Kyriakides, Janet (JK); Leather, David & Midge (DL); Lilley, Ros (RL); Longden, Margaret (ML); Menendez, Rosa (RM); Millard, Paul & Jennifer (PM); Miller, Peter (PMi); Morris, Diane (DM); O'Connor, Denis (DO); O'Donnell, Maire (MO); Partridge, Martin (MP); Penrose, Jessica (JP); Peters, Jo (JP); Purvis, Paul (PP); Ramsden, Dave (DR); Riley, Peter & Anne (PR); Robinson, Graham (GR); Secrett, Malcolm (MS); Shackleton, Karen (KS); Shilland, Ewan (ES); Simcock, Tom & Susan (TS); Speed, Bruce (BS); Taylor, Melanie (MT); Thompson, Julia (JT); Thorn, Bill (BT); Ward, Sarah (SW); Watson, Sylvia (SWa); Webster, Geoff (GW); Wiseman, Lee (LW); WNS Butterfly Walk, (WNSBW).



Scotch Argus. Credit: Nyree Fearnley



White-letter Hairstreak. Credit: Nyree Fearnley



Brimstone. Credit: Nyree Fearnley



Female Holly Blue. Credit: Nyree Fearnley





# Dragonflies and Damselflies

David Alred

## Large red damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

Recorded between 2nd May and 6th July at Timble Ings, Gallows Hill, Otley Wetlands Nature Reserve (OWNR), Otley, Burley in Wharfedale and Addingham.

**Largest count** was on 6th July at Timble (30 individuals).

## Blue tailed damselfly *Ischnura elegans*

No records this year. This is the first year I am aware of where this species has not been recorded but I am confident it is still to be seen in our area. Previous years' records have not given any hint of reduction in numbers. We must hope that some are recorded next year.

## Azure damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

Recorded between 21st May and 15th July at Timble, Otley and Burley in Wharfedale. **Largest count** was on 10th June at Timble (50 individuals).

## Common blue damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Recorded between 27th May and 6th September at Timble, Gallows Hill and OWRN. **Largest count** was on 16th June at OWRN (200 individuals).

## Emerald damselfly *Lestes sponsa*

Recorded between 21st May and 21st August at Timble, Castley, Otley and OWRN. **Largest count** was on 21st August at OWRN (4 individuals).

## Banded demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Recorded between 29th May and 29th June at Lower Washburn, Castley, Gallows Hill, Otley, OWRN, Sun Lane and Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits (BRGP).

**Largest count** were on 9th June at OWRN (8 individuals) and 13th June at Castley (8 individuals).

## Brown hawker *Aeshna grandis*

Recorded between 18th June and 6th September at Timble and OWRN.

**Largest count** were on 26th July and 21st August at OWRN (12 individuals).

## Common hawker *Aeshna juncea*

Recorded only on 23rd June and 26th June, both at Timble.

**Largest count** was 3 individuals.

## Southern hawker *Aeshna cyanea*

Recorded between 3rd August and 29th September at Timble, Otley, OWRN and Burley in Wharfedale.

**Largest count** was on 23rd September at Timble (3 individuals).

Also noted, an emergence from an Otley garden pond of 10 individuals between 25th and 30th June.

## Migrant hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Recorded between 28th August and 29th September, all at OWRN.

**Largest count** was on 6th September (7 individuals).

## Common darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Recorded between 21st August and 29th September, all at OWRN.

**Largest count** was on 29th September (21 individuals).

## Black darter *Sympetrum danae*

Recorded between 13th August and 29th September, all at Timble.

**Largest count** was on 13th August (2 individuals).

## Ruddy darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*

1 Individual recorded on 28th July at OWRN. This was the only site it has previously occurred.

## Black tailed skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

None recorded. For some years we have only had the odd sighting or two at OWRN, so it would not be a surprise if we have lost this species from our area. We must hope for a positive outcome next year.

## Golden ringed dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii*

Recorded between 9th June and 6th July at Timble and Scalebor

**Largest count** was on 29th June at Timble (6 individuals).

## Emperor dragonfly *Anax imperator*

Recorded between 7th June and 6th July at Timble, Otley and OWRN.

**Largest count** was on 29th June at Timble (3 individuals).

## Four spotted chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Recorded between 29th May and 6th July at Timble, OWRN and Burley in Wharfedale.

**Largest count** was on 29th June at Timble (10 individuals).

## Broad bodied chaser *Libellula depressa*

Recorded between 26th May and 29th June at Timble, Gallows Hill, Otley, OWRN and Burley in Wharfedale.

**Largest count** was on 29th June at Timble (6 individuals).

Records received from:  
D & J Alred, D & N Fearnley, D O'Connor, P Purvis, A & P Riley and A Sanderson.

- 1 Southern Hawker emerging from larval case (excuvia)
- 2 Migrant Hawker, mating pair
- 3 Golden Ringed, mating pair
- 4 Broad Bodied Chaser
- 5 Southern Hawker

All images. Credit: David Allred





# Moths

Mike & Joyce Clerk

## Earliest moths sighted in 2023 were:

### January

Light Brown Apple-moth (49.039 - *Epiphyas postvittana* - 0998) indoors, (32.017 - *Agonopterix arenella* - 0697), Ruby Tiger (72.024 - *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* - 2064) larval and Pale Brindled Beauty (70.247 - *Phigalia pilosaria* - 1926).

### February

(40.008 - *Mompha subbistrigella* - 892) indoors, Oak Beauty (70.252 - *Biston strataria* - 1930), March Moth (70.245 - *Alsophila aescularia* - 1663), and Dotted Border (70.255 - *Agriopis marginaria* - 1934).

### March

(32.031 - *Agonopterix alstromeriana* - 0695), (32.007 - *Agonopterix ocellana* - 0701), Mottled Grey (70.101 - *Colostygia multistrigaria* - 1775) and Clouded Drab (73.242 - *Orthosia incerta* - 2188).

## Latest moths sighted in 2023 were:

### October

(49.255 - *Epinotia nisella* - 1138), (41.003 - *Blastobasis lacticolella* - 0874), (49.071 - *Acleris emargana* - 1062), Garden Rose Tortrix (49.077 - *Acleris variegana* - 1048), Sallow (73.182 - *Cirrhia icteritia* - 2274), Red Underwing (72.078 - *Catocala nupta* - 2452), Canary-shouldered Thorn (70.234 - *Ennomos alniaria* - 1913) and Blair's Shoulder-knot (73.206 - *Lithophane leautieri* - 2240).

### November

(49.006x - *Acleris laterana/comariana* - 1038x), Red Sword-grass (73.209 - *Xylena vetusta* - 2241), Scarce Umber (70.254 - *Agriopis aurantiaria* - 1933), Red-green Carpet (70.095 - *Chloroclysta siterata* - 1760), and December Moth (66.001 - *Poecilocampa populi* - 1631).

### December

Sightings like White-shouldered House-moth (28.009 - *Endrosia sarcitrella* - 0648) possible.

**Total of 7,057 records** (1,691 micro and 5,366 macro) were received for **26,295 moth sightings of 591 species** (255 micro and 336 macro) - more records than 2022 (6,424) and species (568) but fewer moths (29,083) seen). The busiest months for moth sightings were **June** - 2,121 records (494 micro, 1,627

macro), **July** - 1,611 records (515 micro, 1,096 macro) and **August** - 914 records (239 micro, 675 macro). The sightings and species recorded in any year always fluctuates according to the weather patterns, abundance of common species and opportunities for regular trapping by WNS moth recorders. Various sites in Burley-in-Wharfedale, Grass Wood area, Ilkley, Kilnsey, Otley, Pool-in-Wharfedale, Skyreholme and Threshfield were regularly monitored using light trapping and wine roping.

**Annual moths frequently seen without using any moth trap** can be viewed on the Wharfedale Naturalists' website [www.wharfedale-nats.org.uk](http://www.wharfedale-nats.org.uk) then search for Moths in the Recording section. Every year we get good records from what we term our 'roving moth-ers': gardeners, walkers, shoppers and butterfly recorders, which all add to the overall picture of local moth activity.

**January** was poor for moth sightings despite the occasional mild night. Only 7 moth species, including (40.006 - *Mompha jurassicella* - 890) indoors, larval or hibernating (e.g. - 44 Tissues in caves).

**Hibernating adults** of Tissue (70.123 - *Triphosa dubitata* - 1790) and Herald (72.001 - *Scoliopteryx libatrix* - 2469) were found in good numbers in local caves regularly monitored from January onwards.

**February** only provided 11 species, including an early Common Quaker (73.244 - *Orthosia cerasi* - 2187).

**March** with a few warmer evenings from mid-month gave: 204 records for 1,138 moths of 34 species, including: (29.001 - *Diurnea fagella* - 0663), Pine Beauty (73.241 - *Panolis flammea* - 2179), Early Grey (73.069 - *Xylocampa areola* - 2243) and Brindled Pug (70.156 - *Eupithecia abbreviate* - 1852).

**Regular moth sightings continued through to mid-October** in traps or elsewhere: Box-tree Moth (63.054 - *Cydalima perspectalis* - 1409a), Large Longhorn (7.015 - *Nematopogon swammerdamella* - 0140), (20.022 - *Argyresthia bonnetella* - 0421), (63.060 - *Evergestis pallidata* - 1358), (49.281 - *Gypsonoma sociana* - 1168), (49.040 - *Lozotaeniodes formosana* - 1001), (35.056 - *Metzneria lappella* - 0724), (62.058 - *Phycitodes binaevella* - 1483), (35.123 - *Scrobipalpa costella* - 0819), (49.071 - *Acleris emargana* - 1062), Brown Silver-line (70.222 - *Petrophora chlorosata* - 1902), Beautiful Hook-tip (72.069 - *Laspeyria flexula* - 2473), Tawny

Speckled Pug (70.187 - *Eupithecia icterata* - 1838), Angle-striped Sallow (73.211 - *Enargia paleacea* - 2313), Marbled White Spot (73.024 - *Protodeltote pygarga* - 2410), Streamer (70.067 - *Anticlea derivata* - 1747), Common Pug (70.183 - *Eupithecia vulgate* - 1834), Beaded Chestnut (73.186 - *Agrochola lychnidis* - 2267), Miller (73.040 - *Acronicta leporina* - 2280), Yellow-barred Brindle (70.200 - *Acasis viretata* - 1883), Dusky-lemon Sallow (73.183 - *Cirrhia gilvago* - 2303) and Shuttle-shaped Dart (73.325 - *Agrotis puta* - 2092).

**Usual annual sightings** of Mint Moth (63.006 - *Pyrausta aurata* - 1361), (63.007 - *Pyrausta purpuralis* - 1362), Humming-bird Hawk-moth (69.010 - *Macroglossum stellatarum* - 1984) and Speckled Yellow (70.229 - *Pseudopanthera macularia* - 1909).

**Adults and caterpillars** recorded in gardens and on walks for: Bird-cherry Ermine (16.001 - *Yponomeuta evonymella* - 0424), Lychnis (73.281 - *Hadena bicurris* - 2173), Emperor Moth (68.001 - *Saturnia pavonia* - 1643), Oak Eggar (66.007 - *Lasiocampa quercus* - 1637), Fox Moth (66.008 - *Macrothylacia rubi* - 1638), Cinnabar (72.031 - *Tyria jacobaeae* - 2069) and Mullein (73.058 - *Cucullia verbasci* - 2221 - larval only).

## The most abundant micro-moths over the 2023 season were:

**Light Brown Apple-moth** (49.039 - *Epiphyas postvittana* - 998) 99 records - 326 moths (29 Mar - 19 Nov);

**Little Grey** (63.067 - *Eudonia lacustrata* - 1338) 54 records for 253 moths (28 May to 07 Sept);

**Garden Grass-veneer** (63.080 - *Chrysoteuchia culmella* 1293) 51 records - 1,000 moths (24 May to 28 Jul);

**Straw Grass-moth** (63.093 - *Agriphila straminella* - 1304) 48 records for 371 moths (16 June to 24 Aug);

**Bee Moth** (62.001 - *Aphomia sociella* - 1428) 42 records for 91 moths (16 Apr to 09 Aug);

**Small Magpie** (63.025 - *Anania hortulata* - 1376) 41 records for 93 moths (17 May to 15 Aug).



# The most abundant macro-moths over the 2023 season were:

**Large Yellow Underwing** (73.342 - *Noctua pronuba* - 2107) 192 records - 4,865 moths (12 Jun to 11 Oct);

**Dark Arches** (73.162 - *Apamea monoglypha* - 2321) 135 records for 891 moths (07 June to 09 Sept);

**Silver Y** (73.015 - *Autographa gamma* - 2441) 128 records for 270 moths (15 May to 19 Oct);

**Heart and Dart** (73.317 - *Agrotis exclamationis* - 2089) 97 records for 384 moths (22 May to 08 Sept);

**Common Rustic agg.** (2343x - *Mesapamea secalis* agg.) (= Common Rustic and Lesser Common Rustic because these can only be differentiated by dissection) 95 records for 720 moths (01 July to 08 Sept);

**Hebrew Character** (73.249 - *Orthosia gothica* - 2190) 90 records for 298 moths (12 Mar to 19 May).

Yorkshire Moths website - information on all moths that occur/once occurred in Yorkshire with distribution maps, photographs, descriptions, flight graphs, County Recorder comments, recording verification grades, ie - if 'Grade 3' or '4' requiring a photo etc. to confirm identification, plus latest 5 records and much more. [www.yorkshiremoths.co.uk](http://www.yorkshiremoths.co.uk)

Further photographs and details of moths at: [www.ukmoths.org.uk](http://www.ukmoths.org.uk) or [www.ukleps.org/index.html](http://www.ukleps.org/index.html)

## Conservation Species 2023

Annually recorded in some specific WNS/VC64 habitats.

**49.174 Phiaris palustrana (1074) - (Nb)**  
- 6 adults - June and August;

**54.003 Cistus Forester** *Adscita geryon* (0164)  
- (NS) - 71 adults - May and June;

**63.003 Pyrausta cingulata (1367) - (Nb)**  
- 10 adults - June;

**63.008 Pyrausta ostrinalis (1363) - (Nb)**  
- 21 adults - May and June;

**70.071 Yellow-ringed Carpet** *Entephria flavicinctata* (1743) - (NS) - 2 adults - August;

**70.135 Heath Rivulet** *Perizoma minorata* (1805) - (NS) - 1 adult - August;

**70.139 Barred Carpet** *Martania taeniata* (1801) - (NS) - 2 adults - July;

**70.201 Barred Tooth-striped** *Trichopteryx polycommata* (1880) - (NS) - 10 adults & 3 larvae - May/June;

**73.146 Least Minor** *Photodes captiuncula* (2344) - (NR) - 1 adult - August.

## Moth highlights:

**6.003 Heliozela sericiella (0154)**  
2 records for 2 individuals on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May on Chevin of a rare day-flying **Local** moth. First adult sighting for Wharfedale and only leaf mines recorded in 2020/2021. The larvae mine the twig of Oak *Quercus* spp.) and later enter the base of the leaf through the midrib. When almost fully fed, larvae cut out a small area from the leaf base to create an oval case, in which to descend to the ground and pupate.

**12.006 Infurcitinea argentimaculella (0203)**  
1 individual on 22<sup>nd</sup> July in Otley was first VC64 sighting of a rare very **Local** moth with few County records. Larvae feed within long Lichen (eg *Lepraria* spp.) covered silken tubes on shady rocks, walls or tree trunks. Tubes containing larvae may be seen on lichen from Apr to Jun and pupation occurs within.

**15.004 Caloptilia elongella (0282)**  
& **15.009 Caloptilia robustella (0287)**  
1 individual on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept of *C. elongella* and 1 individual on 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug of *C. robustella* in Otley. *Caloptilia* species rest with a distinctive posture, the front part of the body raised high on the forelegs. These local **Common** species are often recorded as mines, *C. elongella* on Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) or *C. robustella* on Oak (*Quercus* spp.) or Beech (*Fagus* spp.) but there are few adult sightings.

**15.017 Calybites phasianipennella (0296)**  
1 individual on 8<sup>th</sup> July in Otley of this rare **Local** moth with only one other VC64 record. Two forms: the typical one with large dorsal streak and reduced paler markings elsewhere, & *f. quadrupella* having four large creamy markings. Larvae form a gallery, which turn into a blotch, and later two successive conical leaf-rolls on its foodplants Dock (*Rumex* spp.) and Knotgrass (*Polygonum* spp.).

**15.079 Phyllonorycter stettinensis (0357)**  
1 individual 24<sup>th</sup> May in Otley was the first Wharfedale sighting of a rare **Common** moth with few VC64 records. The moth is bivoltine, with a flight period in May and August. The adult is quite a dark species compared to other *Phyllonorycters*, with contrasting whitish bands. Larvae foodplant is Alder (*Alnus* spp.) and it forms a small oval mine on the upper leaf surface, with a crease down the centre. The mine begins green and then turns orange or brown when more mature.

**32.016 Agonopterix propinquella (0696)**  
Wharfedale records for 3 individuals (\* gen. det.) on 9<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> May in Otley & 7<sup>th</sup> June at Skyreholme of a rare **Local** moth with few records in VC64. Eggs are laid on a leaf of Creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), or Spear

thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), then the larvae mine the underside of the leaf until a late instar then feed in a web under the midrib of the leaf, causing visible blotching on the upper side.

**35.017 Neofaculta ericetella (0797)**  
4 records of 5 individuals between 4<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> June at Barden Fell, Ilkley, Timble Ings (numerous flying) & Otley. This scarce local **Common** moth can be disturbed during the day near Heathers (*Calluna/Erica* spp.) The larvae feed on the flowers then later in larval spinings on the shoots.

**35.026 Acompsia cinerella (0855)**  
1 individual (\* gen. det.) on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug in Grass Wood area is first Upper Wharfedale sighting of this rare **Local** moth with few VC64 records. An unmarked brownish moth with long upwardly-curved labial palps. Larvae is unknown, but thought to feed on mosses (*Bryophytes* spp.) at the base of a tree.

**37.016 Coleophora spinella (0495)** 37.035 *C. alcyonipennella* (0517) & 37.071 *C. glaucicolella* (0582)  
1 individual on 4<sup>th</sup> July of the rare **Common** *C. spinella* and 1 individual on 6<sup>th</sup> Sept of the scarce **Local** *C. alcyonipennella* in Otley (all\* gen. det.). Then 4 individuals of **Common** *C. glaucicolella* between 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June in Otley & Skyreholme (all\* gen. det.). *C. spinella* larvae create blotch mines and later live in a series of portable cases, on Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.). *C. alcyonipennella* larvae frequents rough grassy areas for White Clover (*Trifolium repens*). *C. glaucicolella* larvae feed on Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*).

**38.016 Elachista subalbidella (0621)**  
1 individual on 12<sup>th</sup> June at Timble Ings of a rare very **Local** moth flying over moors and heaths. First record for Wharfedale and only the second one in VC64 of a distinctive *Elachista*, with rather uniform yellowish-ochre forewings. Larvae create narrow mines in blades of Purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*).

**40.010 Mompha epilobiella (0893)**  
1 individual on 15<sup>th</sup> April in Otley of a scarce local **Common** moth. Adults hibernate and are found throughout the year. Larvae feed on various Willowherbs (*Epilobium* spp.) forming spinings in the shoots.

**49.002 Isotrias rectifasciana (1014)**  
1 individual on 12<sup>th</sup> June in Otley is first Wharfedale record of this uncommon **Local** moth. The life history of the early stages is imperfectly known, though in captivity they have fed on Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.).

**49.020 Argyrotaenia ljunghiana (0974)**  
1 individual on 17<sup>th</sup> May at Timble Ings of a rare local **Common** moth with few VC64 records. A variable species, typically well-marked, but with some specimens duller and more obscure. Flying April to June on heaths and moors where larvae feed on Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and Heathers (*Calluna/Erica* spp.).

**49.056 Cnephasia conspersana (1019)**

1 individual (\* gen. det.) on 10<sup>th</sup> July in Otley of a rare **Nationally Scarce B (Nb)** moth with very few County records. Only the second sighting in VC64 with earlier one being 104 years ago! A mainly coastal species with larvae feeding on the flowers of Rosaceae and Compositae plant families. Adult moths are attracted to light but they can also be disturbed during the day or found resting on fence posts.

**49.010 Philedonides lunana (1009)**

3 records of 7 individuals on 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July on Chevin and Ilkley Moor of a rare **Nationally Scarce B (Nb)** moth with few VC64 records. A species of moorland and heathland with larvae feeding on a wide variety of moorland plants, including Heathers (*Calluna/Erica spp.*), and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), spinning together leaves or flowers. Male moths are relatively dull brown and have pectinate antennae and females have more distinctive chestnut brown markings on a greyish-buff ground colour.

**49.021 Ptycholomoides aeriferanus (0987)**

1 individual on 28<sup>th</sup> July at Skyreholme was the first sighting in Upper Wharfedale of this scarce local **Common** moth. A species which is gradually extending its range northwards. Larval foodplant is European larch (*Larix decidua*), the larvae spinning the needles together.

**49.033 Aphelia viburnana (0988)**

1 individual on 24<sup>th</sup> June in Otley of a rare local **Common** moth. Only the third sighting in Wharfedale with the last one in 2015. Readily disturbed by day flying in sunny conditions over heath and moor. Larvae feed on many shrubs and herbaceous plants eg Sallow (*Salix spp.*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmari*).

**49.078 Acleris aspersana (1043)**

2 individuals on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug in Grass Wood area of a scarce and local **Common** moth. Quite a small member of the Acleris genus, it prefers open areas like grassland, downs and heaths. Adults fly from afternoon onwards, in July and August and its larvae feed in the rolled-up leaves of a range of herbaceous plants.

**49.080 Acleris hastiana (1053)**

1 individual (\* gen. det.) on 4<sup>th</sup> July in Otley was the first Wharfedale sighting of this scarce and local **Common** moth. A variable British tortrix moth, with dozens of named forms, and many intermediate types. Two generations can be found flying in June/July and again from August, before hibernating overwinter. Larvae feed on small-leaved Willows (*Salix spp.*) and spin together two or more leaves.

**49.086 Acleris logiana (1051)**

1 individual on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct in Otley was the first Wharfedale sighting of this rare **Local** moth. British distribution of this moth was restricted to Scotland until it was found in southern England in 1991. First Yorkshire record was (VC63) in 2010. Two generations can be found flying in June/July and again from Sept to April (overwintering). Larvae feed between spun leaves of old Birches (*Betula spp.*)

**49.123 Aethes beatricella (0951)**

1 individual on 24<sup>th</sup> June in Otley was the first Wharfedale sighting of a scarce and very **Local** moth. Flying during June and July, in the evening and into dusk, usually on waste ground, woodland fringes and hedgerows. Larvae feed mainly on Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).

**49.138 Neochylis molliculana (0964a)**

1 individual on 9<sup>th</sup> July in Otley of a rare **Local** moth and first VC64 record. This species lays two broods of eggs in the flowerheads of Bristly ox-tongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), first in late Spring and later from July to Sept. The pale-yellow larvae feed on the seeds and first brood pupates on the seedheads, emerging as adults in late July and staying active until Sept. Second brood leave the seedhead for leaf litter, spin cocoons and overwintering until Spring.

**49.144 Eudemis profundana (1113)**

1 individual on 28<sup>th</sup> July at Threshfield of a rare local **Common** moth. A variable species with a rich mixture of reddish ground-colour overlaid with darker and paler marbling and large, conspicuous whitish dorsal blotch. Adults fly in July and Aug then the larvae feed in a rolled leaf of Oak (*Quercus spp.*).

**49.211 Ancylis myrtillana (1128)**

3 individuals between 24<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> June in Otley, Ilkley and on Barden Fell of a rare **Local** moth associated with moorland habitats. Adult moths fly from May to July, both in afternoon sunshine and from dusk onwards. Foodplants are Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and Bog bilberry (*V. uliginosum*), with larvae creating a kind of pod by spinning two leaves together.

**49.362 Pammene giganteana (1227)**

2 individuals on 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> April in Otley and on the Chevin were the first Wharfedale sightings of this very rare **Nationally Scarce B (Nb)** moth. A distinctive species with rather long and narrow forewings, a horseshoe-shaped whitish blotch on its dorsum and whitish hindwings with a dark border. Larvae feed inside oak-apple galls and other, spongy galls made by Hymenoptera on Oak (*Quercus spp.*) and their presence is sometimes betrayed by frass exuded from the gall.

**49.381 Strophedra weirana (1221)**

1 individual on 19<sup>th</sup> June in Otley of a rare day flying very **Local** moth was first Wharfedale & VC64 adult record (larvae sighting in 2015). Larvae feeds on Beech (*Fagus spp.*), attaching two leaves together with silk and feeding within, causing a noticeable blotch on the leaf surfaces.

**62.064 Ephestia elutella (1473)**

1 individual (\* gen. det.) on 29<sup>th</sup> July in Otley of rare local **Nationally Scarce B (Nb)** moth. Adults are on the wing between June and Oct and are most often found indoors or in warehouses. Larvae can be pests of stored food products but this species is only seldom recorded. First Wharfedale record & only third VC64.

**63.048 Palpita vitrealis (1408)**

1 individual on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct at Skyreholme of a rare, very local wandering **Migrant** moth with few County sightings. Autumn is the most likely period to encounter this species, and particularly in south or south west England. This moth has translucent wings with a slight sheen and an orange or brown leading edge. Abroad it feeds on Jasmine (*Jasminum spp.*) and Olive (*Olea spp.*).

**63.123 Donacaula forficella (1329)**

1 individual on 13<sup>th</sup> July in Otley was only the third Wharfedale sighting of this scarce **Local** moth. Adults fly in June and July and their larvae inhabit marshy areas and ditches. Larvae often cut part of a leaf to act as a raft to float on the water towards more of the foodplant Common reed (*Phragmites australis*).

**70.026 Smoky Wave Scopula ternata (1694)**

1 individual on 14<sup>th</sup> June in Bastow Wood of a rare local day flying **Common** moth. Adults are easily disturbed on moors and mosses where Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) the larval foodplant occurs.

**70.038 Vestal Rhodometra sacraria (1716)**

1 individual on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct in Otley of a scarce and **local** Immigrant/wandering moth. Last Wharfedale record was when there were an unprecedented 29 records in the great Yorkshire migrant autumn of 2006. Flying mainly at night it is regularly attracted to light and the amount and intensity of pink pigmentation on this moth is somewhat variable. The species breeds in southern Europe and North Africa, and the larvae live on Knotgrass (*Polygonum spp.*), Dock (*Rumex spp.*) and other low plants.

**70.036 Maiden's Blush Cyclophora punctaria (1680)**

1 individual on 5<sup>th</sup> June in Otley was first Wharfedale record of this rare local **Common** moth. Like other Cyclophora species, it has two generations, the first flying in May and June, and the second in August. The distinctive larvae feed on the leaves of Oak (*Quercus spp.*).

**70.063 Small Argent and Sable**

**Epirrhoe tristata (1737)** 4 individuals on 12<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>th</sup> July at Timble Ings for an attractive rare **Local** Common day-flying moth. County populations are evident in Yorkshire Dales, eastern part of North York Moors and moors west of Sheffield but no recent records from lowland heaths. Larvae feed on Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*).

**70.066 Shoulder Stripe**

**Earophila badiata (1746)**

1 individual on 7<sup>th</sup> April in Otley for an uncommon thinly distributed **Common** moth with an early flight period. It shows a variety of colour forms, but all have the same basic pattern. Inhabiting woodland, scrubland and other open areas its larvae feed on wild roses like Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*).



### 70.068 Beautiful Carpet

*Mesoleuca albicillata* (1748)

1 individual on 6<sup>th</sup> July in Otley of a scarce local moth not often recorded in Wharfedale (last seen 2013). Larvae of this **Common** species are green marked with orange-brown chevrons, and feed on Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), Raspberry (*R. idaea*) and Wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*).

### 70.072 Grey Mountain Carpet

*Entephria caesiata* (1744)

1 individual on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug in Grass Wood area of a scarce local upland moth. This **Common** species, rather variable in appearance, day flies and is known for its habit of resting on stone walls and rocks.

### 70.090 Chevron *Eulithis testata* (1755)

7 records for 21 individuals between 9<sup>th</sup> Aug and 7<sup>th</sup> Sept at the regular trapping sites of this uncommon widespread resident species. A **Common** quite variable moth displaying colour forms from yellowish through to fairly dark brown. Inhabiting moorland or sandy and woodland areas the larval foodplants are Sallow (*Salix* spp.), Aspen (*Populus tremula*) and Birch (*Betula* spp.).

### 70.110 Small Autumnal Moth *Epirrita filigrammaria* (1798)

1 individual on 5<sup>th</sup> Sept at Denton of a scarce local **Common** moth of upland areas. This is the least difficult *Epirrita* species to identify, being smaller and usually more well marked. It flies in August and September, and the larvae feed on Heathers (*Calluna/Erica* spp.) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).

### 70.217 Rannoch Looper

*Macaria brunneata* (1896)

1 individual on 17<sup>th</sup> June in Otley of a very rare, local, **Nationally Scarce (NS)** moth with only one previous County record in 1992. An influx from the North Sea in June gave a few more single records of this day-flying species around the county. It usually rests butterfly-like, with the wings held closed. Larvae are brown with a pale spiracular stripe, and feed on Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).

### 70.253 Spring Usher

*Agriopsis leucophaearia* (1932)

1 individual on 11<sup>th</sup> February in Otley of a scarce local **Common** moth. Five previous Wharfedale records of which only one was in last ten years. Adult moths emerge in February and March. The wingless females climb up tree trunks and male moths, vary from black-and-white to a drab greyish rather plain appearance, fly weakly to them. Larvae feed mainly on Oak (*Quercus* spp.).

### 71.011 Lunar Marbled Brown

*Drymonia ruficornis* (2015)

1 individual on 28<sup>th</sup> April in Otley of this scarce thinly distributed **Common** moth. Similar to the Marbled Brown (*D. dodonea*), which flies slightly later, it is recognised by the black crescent in the white area of the forewing. It flies April and May in deciduous woodland where larvae feed on Oak (*Quercus* spp.).

### 72.007 Beautiful Snout

*Hypena crassalis* (2476)

1 individual on 16<sup>th</sup> June in Otley of this very rare local **Common** moth which flies at dusk. A species of open woodland with larvae foodplant Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), however, it also has a tendency to wander on to open moorland and even into gardens.

### 72.025 Wood Tiger

*Parasemia plantaginis* (2056)

1 individual on 4<sup>th</sup> June in Otley on Ilkley moor of this scarce thinly distributed **Common** moth. A species of woodland, downland and acid grassland. Males often fly in sunshine, but the females tend to be mainly nocturnal. Larvae feed on a range of herbaceous plants.

### 72.049 Orange Footman

*Eilema sororcula* (2043)

4 records of single individuals between 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 16<sup>th</sup> June in Otley of this rare local **Common** moth. A woodland species, with few records in VC64. Larvae live on lichens growing on the trunks of Oak (*Quercus* spp.) and Beech (*Fagus* spp.) trees.

### 73.033 Figure of Eight

*Diloba caeruleocephala* (2020)

1 individual on 9<sup>th</sup> Oct in Otley of this uncommon thinly distributed species. This **Common** moth has declined drastically in County since 1980 but one or two are seen in the same locations each year. It overwinters as an egg on the larvae foodplants, Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Apple (*Malus* spp.) so its survival must be influenced to some extent by winter pruning.

### 73.039 Sycamore *Acronicta aceris* (2279)

5 records of regular sightings between 31<sup>st</sup> May and 21<sup>st</sup> July in Burley-in-Wharfedale and Otley of this rare local **Common** moth. Adult ground colour varies from pale grey to dark sooty-grey, however, the larvae are brightly-coloured with yellow and orange hairs and a row of black-edged white blotches along the back. Larvae feeds on Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*).

### 73.053 Chamomile Shark

*Cucullia chamomillae* (2214)

1 individual on 28<sup>th</sup> Apr in Otley of a scarce local **Common** moth. First adult record for Wharfedale following a larval sighting in 2004. Flying from Apr to Jun on roadside verges, wasteground and commons where larvae feed on various Compositae, including Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*).

### 73.061 Anomalous *Stilbia anomala* (2394)

25 individuals on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug in Grass Wood area of a scarce local **Common** moth. A fairly distinctive greyish species of upland grassland and moorland where larvae feed on Deschampsia species, Tufted and Wavy Hair-grass.

### 73.109 Straw Underwing

*Thalophila matura* (2303)

1 individual on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug in Grass Wood area of a thinly distributed **Common** moth. First sighting in Upper Wharfedale of a species attracted to both light and sugar. This moth frequents open grassland, moors and downs and the nocturnal larvae feed on various grasses.

### 73.118 Haworth's Minor

*Celaena haworthii* (2367)

1 individual on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept in Otley of this scarce local **Common** moth usually seen on wet acid moorland. Flight period is Aug and Sept, with males flying on sunny days, but mainly nocturnal and attracted to light. Larvae feed internally in the stems Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum* spp.) is the main foodplant.

### 73.119 Crescent *Helotropha leucostigma* (2368)

1 individual on 6<sup>th</sup> Sept in Otley of this uncommon thinly distributed species of damp, marshy woodland and moorland. The eggs of this **Common** moth overwinter and hatch in spring when the larvae feed on the stems of marshland plants, like Yellow-flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*).

### 73.179 Orange Sallow *Tiliacea citrigo* (2271)

1 individual on 31<sup>st</sup> Aug in Threshfield of this scarce local **Common** moth. Scattered pattern of records because species prefers woodland, parkland and suburban areas, where its foodplant is established. Larvae feed initially on the leaf-buds and later on the leaves of Lime (*Tilia* spp.).

### 73.201 Pale Pinion *Lithophane socia* (2236)

9 records of 10 individuals between 20<sup>th</sup> Mar and 4<sup>th</sup> June in Otley and Grass Wood of a scarce local **Common** moth. Inhabiting woodland, these polyphagous moths are on the wing in Oct and Nov then reappear after hibernation in early spring when breeding occurs.

### 73.202 Grey Shoulder-knot

*Lithophane ornitopus* (2237)

9 records in Otley area of this scarce local **Common** moth. One or two moths regularly seen between 19<sup>th</sup> Mar and 15<sup>th</sup> Apr, and then again between 21<sup>st</sup> Sept and 17<sup>th</sup> Oct. Adults emerge in Sept and Oct, and then overwinter, appearing again from Feb to Apr. The larval foodplant is Oak (*Quercus* spp.), and like several other *Lithophane* species, they have the tendency towards cannibalism.

### 73.209 Red Sword-grass *Xylena vetusta* (2241)

2 records on in Otley area on 16<sup>th</sup> Mar and 16<sup>th</sup> Nov for a scarce local **Common/Immigrant** moth. A large species, of damp woodland, mountain moorland and marshy places, which rests with the wings furled tightly around the abdomen, tapering to a point. Flight period is Sept and Oct, after which it hibernates, appearing again in Mar and Apr. Larvae feed on a wide range of deciduous trees, shrubs, and low plants.

- 1 Scarce Silver-lines
- 2 Rannoch Looper
- 3 *Infurcitinea argentimaculella*
- 4 Vestal
- 5 Maiden's Blush
- 6 Peach Blossom

Credit: Aidan Smith

### 73.356 Heath Rustic *Xestia agathina* (2135)

3 individuals on 5<sup>h</sup> Sept at Denton of a scarce thinly distributed **Common** (BAP R) moth. Chiefly a species of heaths and moors, flying in Sept and recognised in a number of colour forms in different parts of the country. The larval foodplant is mainly Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*).

**\*gen.det.** - require examination of a specimen's genitalia to determine to species level.

## Conservation status of micro-species:

**RDB3: Red Data Book 3:** Recorded from 11-15 10 km squares in Great Britain.

**Nationally Scarce A (Na):** Recorded from 16-30 10 km squares in Great Britain.

**Nationally Scarce B (Nb):** Recorded from 31-100 10 km squares in Great Britain.

**Local:** Recorded from 101-300 10 km squares in Great Britain.

**Common:** Recorded from over 300 10 km squares in Great Britain.

**Migrant:** Moths travelling to the UK.

(Source - *Micro-moth National Status* (published 2012 - Davis et al.)

## Conservation status of macro-species:

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) of Threatened Species - Review of status of macro-moths in Great Britain - source - Fox et al. (2019)

Red List Status: for example:

**'NEAR THREATENED (NT)'** - likely to qualify against criteria for a threatened category in near future.

**'LEAST CONCERN (LC)'** - Widespread and abundant species

**GB Status:**

**'NATIONALLY RARE(NR)'** - 15 or fewer hectads (10km x 10km grid sq) GB Ordnance survey - 2000-14

**'NATIONALLY SCARCE(NS)'** - not more than 100 hectads - 2000-2014 - source - Fox et al. (2019)

**'COMMON'** - Native species (as resident breeding species) from more than 100 hectads - 2000-2014 & includes former 'Local' status category ones.

**'IMMIGRANT'** - Species known to migrate to Britain but do not normally survive the winter.

**'ADVENTIVE'** - Species in Britain as a result of deliberate or accidental importation by humans.

**UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP):**

**'Priority Species'** - BAP Priority Species

**'Declining Species (BAP R)'** - BAP Declining Species (Research Only).

Full details - see [www.yorkshiremoths.co.uk](http://www.yorkshiremoths.co.uk) Select - 'Info' tab, then Select - 'Conservation Statuses'

We forward all Wharfedale Naturalists' (WN) moth records to the VC64 Co-ordinator for inclusion in the UK National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) organised by Butterfly Conservation. Thanks to Dr. Charles Fletcher (VC 64 Co-ordinator) for his support to moth observers over the last year.

We are grateful for all the records received from: Chris Acomb, Chris Alder, Katty & Mark Baird, Christine Bell, Karen Bullimore, Peter & Janet Burns, Ryan Clark, Win Clements, Jeff & Debbie Davitt, Heather Dawe, Stephen Dawes, David & Nyree Fearnley, #Charles Fletcher, Audrey Gramshaw, Rosa Menendez, Paul Millard, Denis O'Connor, Martin Partridge, Peter & Anne Riley, #Aidan Smith, Robyn Smith, Beth Thomas, Jenny & Alastair Watson, #Lee Wiseman and Andy Woodall.

# provided their 'moth highlights/species' list for WNS Moth Report purposes only - ensuring no record duplication in NMRS database.

If anyone is interested in taking up moth recording and would like further advice we will be happy to help.

Our e-mail address is: [naturefind@clerk54.plus.com](mailto:naturefind@clerk54.plus.com)





# Ladybirds

Anne Riley

A very poor year for ladybirds (and records!). Harlequins continue to dominate and are ubiquitous. If I go out looking for ladybirds at any time of year, it's rare not to find one.

2<sup>nd</sup> January I decided to try and find my first ladybird of the year. On a short section of metal fence bordering mature woodland at Scalebor, I found a harlequin, a 2-spot (*typica*; red with 2 black spots), a cream-spot, and two orange ladybirds!

I repeated the exercise at the end of the year, on 25<sup>th</sup> December and found a cluster of three orange ladybirds and eight harlequins. This is a location where I nearly always find something, even if it's just a harlequin.

This illustrates the point of how records can be rather dependant on the determination of the recorder, and not necessarily a reflection of presence of species, particularly with insects. Unfortunately, this early haul of species did not continue through the year and even 7-spots were difficult to find. It was also a dismal year for 2-spots compared to 2022.

## Seven-spot ladybird

*Coccinella 7-punctata* (25/82)

I didn't find my first 7-spot of the year until 7<sup>th</sup> April (Scalebor) and Paul Purvis (PP) didn't find one until 29<sup>th</sup> April, on a wooden stile east of Otley. The last record was on 5<sup>th</sup> November in our garden (Woodhill, Burley) found by PR. The in-between records were from around Burley (AR) and Otley (PP). The only counts in double figures were from PP, with 13 on nettles at Otley Wetland Nature Reserve (OWNR) on 26<sup>th</sup> June (PP), another 10 at OWRN on 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> July and 10 on 13<sup>th</sup> July on Otley Chevin.

## Eyed ladybird

*Anatis ocellata* (4/5)

I found one in the 'usual' place on the 'Pine Path' (SE152458) near Scalebor on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and another on each of 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July. Nyree and David Fearnley (NDF) found two in Stainburn Forest on 16<sup>th</sup> July.

## Cream spot ladybird

*Calvia 14-guttata* (4/4)

One with the 'haul' on Scalebor metal fence on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, one on the Pine Path on 13<sup>th</sup> July and one at Scalebor pavilion on 5<sup>th</sup> October (AR). PP had one record on 18<sup>th</sup> June in Weston Wood. Not a commonly recorded species in our area.

## 2-spot ladybird

*Adalia 2-punctata* (8/9)

A really poor year, especially when compared to 2022. One with the 'haul' on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, then odd sightings from Burley and Otley through to July. PP had a mating pair (*quadrimaculata* form) at OWRN on 16<sup>th</sup> June – the only sighting of more than one individual!

## Adonis ladybird

*Hippodamia variegata*

No records this year.

## 10-spot ladybird

*Adalia 10-punctata* (2/2)

It's hard to see how this ladybird was given its name as it can have any number of spots (up to 15) and has variable colour forms (cream, yellow, orange, red, maroon, black, brown or light brown wing cases and orange, red, black, brown, maroon, yellow spots) and patterns (fused spots for example). It has orange/brown legs but shouldn't be confused with the Harlequin ladybird which is bigger. This year there were just two sightings, both from Stead fence: 16<sup>th</sup> April a *guttatopunctata* form, and 6<sup>th</sup> July a *bimaculata* form (AR).

## 14-spot ladybird

*Propylea 14-punctata* (5/5)

Just 5 records this year, all of singles. First record from Woodhill garden on 29<sup>th</sup> May and another on each of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> June. PP found one at OWRN on 7<sup>th</sup> July and one in his Otley garden on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

## 22-spot ladybird

*Psyllobora 22-punctata* (4/5)

After the fantastic year in 2020 this ladybird has once again been hard to find. PP had the first record on 7<sup>th</sup> May on the path between Farnley and Leathley. I found one on the 'Bull Farm path' (SE156457), the site of many tens in 2020, on 24<sup>th</sup> May and then a mating pair on 6<sup>th</sup> July. PP had one in his garden on 5<sup>th</sup> September.

## Orange ladybird

*Halyzia 16-guttata* (9/32)

This ladybird on the other hand seemed to do rather well with the first record on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and the last on 25<sup>th</sup> December, both on the metal fence at Scalebor. In between, I found good numbers (max. 16) on the backs of Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) leaves at Scalebor pavilion in October.

## Larch ladybird

*Aphidecta oblitterata*

No records this year.

## Pine ladybird

*Exochomus 4-pustulatus*

No records

## Kidney spot ladybird

*Chilocorus renipustulatus* (6/11)

One on the Pine Path on 24<sup>th</sup> April, and three more sightings in July and August, including one larva (AR). PP started finding them again at Gallows Hill – three on one occasion in May and four in November, so they are still there.

## 18-spot ladybird

*Myrrha octodecimguttata* (3/6)

Three records, all in July from the Pine Path. Four individuals on 24<sup>th</sup> July, but only because I was looking very hard! (AR).

## Striped ladybird

*Myzia oblongoguttata*

No records despite diligent searching!

## Cream-streaked ladybird

*Harmonia quadripunctata* (3/3)

Easily mistaken for a Harlequin (*succinea* form), I did find three in July and August on the fence on the Pine Path.

## Harlequin ladybird

*Harmonia axyridis* (44/hundreds!)

Records from 2<sup>nd</sup> January to 25<sup>th</sup> December – this ladybird can be found in every month of the year if you look for it. Numbers peak from October to December when they aggregate to hibernate – PP found at least a hundred in a nest box at OWRN in December. Audrey Gramshaw also found several in Guiseley through the year. NDF sent records from Farnley in October and November.

Apologies to anyone who sent records and is not mentioned in the text.



- 1 Ladybird cluster, Scalebor
- 2 10-spot bimaculata
- 3 Orange ladybird
- 4 Adalia 10-punctata guttatopunctata form

Credit: Anne Riley



# Wharfedale Weather Summary 2023

Peter Bancroft

Recording weather station:  
Burley-in-Wharfedale.

Height above sea-level: 100m

## Rainfall

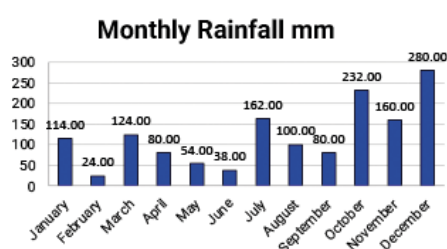
Total rainfall for the year was 1448mm (57inches) which is highest since our records began in 1926.

This compares with annual average rainfall of 945mm (37.2inches) since 1926 and 1019mm (40inches) this century.

It was very much a year of two halves with 1014mm (39.9inches) being recorded in the second 6 months which is the same as the annual average this century and greater than the annual average since 1926.

The highest monthly rainfall was recorded in December with 280mm (11inches) and 232mm (9inches) in October.

The lowest annual rainfall was recorded in 1964 with 605mm (23.8inches).



## Temperature

The coldest months were January 3.53C & December 4.79C as expected.

**What was unexpected was that the warmest month was June with average daily 16.85°C and that September would be so warm at 15.33°C. However, this was much lower than 2022 when both July & August averaged over 18°C.**

**The highest daily temperature was 30°C recorded in June. September had the next highest at 28C with highs of 27C in July and August.**

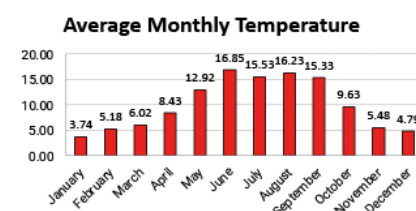
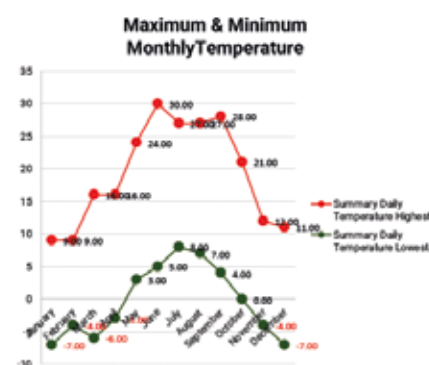
The average daily temperature for 2023 was 10.01C (10.00C for 2022) compared to the average since 1936 of 9.05C and 9.72°C for this century.

The coolest year was 1986 at an average of 7.1°C and the warmest was in 2004 and 2007 at 10.4C; the only year above 10°C outside this century was 1959 at 10.1°C

Temperatures of zero & below were recorded in 6 months of the year with the **latest sub-zero temperature being on 3 April.**

**The lowest recorded temperature was -7°C which occurred on 21 January.**

**There were no days where the maximum temperature was not sub 0°C which is unusual.**







# Fungi

Andy Woodall

Hello! I've recently taken over as the fungi recorder for the Wharfedale Naturalists (WN), a post I think has been vacant for some time. This report won't be a list of species found in the WNS recording area, as there is little point in duplicating my records which go to the Mid-Yorkshire Fungus Group (MYFG) recorder and ultimately to a national database. Those people in the society who are seriously interested in fungi will already have access to these records through MYFG. New members would be very welcome.

In future years I intend to keep a separate list of significant finds in Wharfedale which I can then put in this annual report.

I'm also offering an identification service for anyone who wants to send me photographs or better still, bring me specimens. Of course, I cannot guarantee I will be able to identify them just from a photograph. Often after a field meeting, we must take specimens home to get spore prints or do arcane activities like looking at the gill edge under the microscope. Most fungi are essentially microorganisms, only large when they are at the fruiting stage and produce mushrooms, brackets, and other fruiting bodies. Microscopy and a battery of chemicals are the norm for identifying some species.

It is possible, however, to be fairly sure of a large number of species if the photos are good enough. Ideally what is needed is several photos of the same thing from above, below and from the side. A cross-section and any information on habitat, substrate and smell could be very useful - all key identifying characters. Obviously, that isn't always possible, and I'll do my best with whatever I get.

The fungi season is being extended yearly through global world wide web and anyway there are always some fungi about, so don't wait until next autumn to send your pictures.

I'm involved with the WN group surveying the Denton Estate, as part of the estate's re-wilding project. I've visited half a dozen times and submitted lists of fungi to the estate. No fungi of any great significance have been found so far. This is not such a bad thing as things can only improve with the project. They will not be replanting woodland on prime grassland fungi habitat.

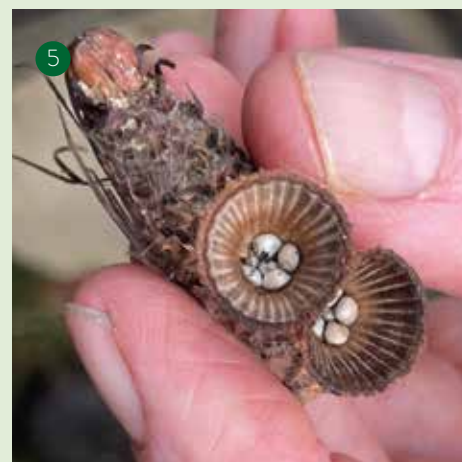
Ian has already reported on the foray we did this year along with Bradford Botany Group. I know there are many members that are in both groups. Fungi don't really belong in a botany group, but most members are not blinkered to one aspect of natural history. In fact one of the best finds of the day was a party of Crossbills quietly feeding at the top of a conifer in the Swinsty car park.

On the foray Ian listened to the hisses some fungi make as they shoot off thousands of spores at once. He could hear them quite clearly with the fungus held to his ear...so probably not in need of the hearing test appointment he had the next day. They may have found an unusually large number of spores if they did a physical examination of his ears.



- 1 Stinkhorn
- 2 Wicker basket collection
- 3 Powderpuff Bracket
- 4 Dog's vomit slime mould
- 5 Fluted Bird's Nest
- 6 Fungal Foray at Swinsty
- 7 Dissected juvenile Stinkhorn (Devils Egg)
- 8 Common Bonnet

Credit: Ian Brand





# Botany

Bruce Brown

2023 proved to be an active year for WNS botanists with nine official meetings ranging from Huby in lower Wharfedale up-dale to Arncliffe in Littondale, and averaging a dozen members at each, apart from a joint meeting with BBG at Kilnsey Park with 26 present. We also had a great day at Malham exploring the Cove and Janet's Foss. The Denton Park estate is in the process of converting to conservation management and invited WNS members to undertake various surveys. The botanists were involved with two - assessing the parkland trees for addition to the Woodlands Trust 'Ancient Tree Inventory' (ATI) and assisting Yorkshire Peat Partnership (YPP) with quadrat monitoring for the Denton Moor restoration project. One of our meetings was a survey of Hundwith Beck on the estate. We also held a meeting on the Bolton Abbey Estate surveying grassland near Cavendish and Pickles Gill woodland. In addition, the Estate invited us to survey Low House Farm and Mucky Park at Barden. A few of us completed the moorland survey of Mucky Park later in the year, the rest to follow in 2024.

BSBI published the 2020 National Plant Atlas in March, a two-volume set weighing in at about 7kg! However, it is available on line. It includes all records since the last atlas in 2000 and thoroughly analyses trends in plant populations and their distribution, changes in habitats and climate. A large increase in reported alien plants, garden escapes, etc. is one notable conclusion. BNB with much help from CH continued to record the WNS tetrads (4 x 1km squares on OS maps), information which will now go towards a future atlas. There are 194 tetrads (including part-tetrads along boundaries) in the WNS area. Our progress to date over 4 years since 2020 totals 137 tetrads with a minimum of 50 records per tetrad, and many with over 100 records. So

around 70% coverage has been reached, but still there is plenty to look for on repeat visits as many well-botanised tetrads have 300 or more previous records from the past.

Recollections of the year's weather patterns are a dry spring and early summer, especially a hot June when the drought was wilting plants on thin soils and limestone rocks in the Dales. Then it broke to a wet July and August, remaining pretty much unsettled for the rest of the year, allowing vegetation to recover, until the first real frosts in early December. And last but not least, we sent our best wishes to John Webb, a regular member on our botany meetings, who was hospitalised with a stroke later in the year.

## Botanical Overview

### Lower Wharfedale

The lower reaches of our recording area below where the river Washburn enters the Wharfe are often less frequented, but this was rectified with a WNS survey of Bogridge Farm near Huby last July. It was a lovely, interesting day, details in report further on. NDF made one or two early season visits noting Coltsfoot *Tussilago farfara* in Castley and Stainburn Forest. Giant Butterbur *Petasites japonicus* was still doing well by the roadside in Castley, and 50 white flowered Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* were seen in Weeton on 1 April. In May ten plants of Dusky Crane's-bill *Geranium phaeum* were found in Rougemont. They returned to Stainburn Forest on 1 July to check the orchids there. Common Spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* totalled about 300 plants, among which were two purple-blotched var. *rhodochila* and four pure white var. *albiflora*, both rarer forms known from the forest tracksides but variable in numbers from year to year. A new record was the eight Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* found unexpectedly in two locations, so a successful day out.

ARG made several visits in and around Weeton noting Garden Grape-hyacinth *Muscari armeniacum*, Ivy-leaved Speedwell *Veronica hederifolia* and Glory-of-the-snow *Scilla forbesii* in early spring, then Garden *Lobelia* *Lobelia erinus*, Procumbent Yellow-sorrel *Oxalis corniculata* and Red Bartsia *Odontites verna* in July along Gallogate Lane. Hop *Humulus lupulus* and Black Bryony *Tamus communis* were scrambling in the hedgerows. BNB/CH visited the Huby/North Rigton area in September, initially to collect apples for the ONCA crab apple project (see report further on) and then explored the surrounding lanes, noting quite a few more crab trees in the hedgerows. We had not realised that the Huby area was such a popular location for them. We added 44 further records for the local SE24T tetrad including Bay Willow *Salix pentandra*, Black Bryony, Hidcote Comfrey *Symphytum x hidcotensis* and Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum*.



## Washburn Valley

In early February BNB/CH were walking around Norwood Edge noting how frequently one sees Snowdrops *Galanthus nivalis* nowadays, usually not that far from habitation or roadsides, and clearly well naturalised. Once they were considered to be a native species, but now generally accepted as an alien, known to be cultivated in Britain by 1597 and first recorded in the wild in 1778. The 2020 Plant Atlas notes a big increase in records over the last few decades. On a track at Bland Hill we came across another snowdrop, the Green-leaved Snowdrop *G. woronowii*, less commonly seen growing wild and distinguished by its very wide fresh green leaves. In April NDF came across a 300 plant colony of Creeping Comfrey *S. grandiflora* along a Lindley bridleway, whilst BNB checking for spring flora by Dob Park Bridge found Moschatel *Adoxa moschatelina*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*.

Permission to begin construction work on the A59 west of Blubberhouses had been granted so BNB took the opportunity for a last look round before the area became out of bounds. Kex Gill drops into a steep-sided ravine below the A59 and was first explored with John Webb prior to 2020 finding it to be an interesting plant rich wetland area. In 2023 large stone abutments below the road held colonies of the aliens Silver Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla conjuncta* and Welsh Poppy *Papaver cambricum* plus some Common Whitlowgrass *Erophila verna* and Common Polypody *Polypodium vulgare*. In the boggy areas by the beck side were Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* amongst others. The old quarry entrance above had some throw-outs such as Galingale *Cyperus longus*, Monbretia *Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora* and False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*. Dittander *Lepidium latifolium* was growing on the A59 verge.

JP found Deergass *Tricophorum germanicum* in Timble lngs plantation and later, on the edge of Fewston reservoir was several interesting plants including Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata* and plentiful amounts of Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*. Swinsty Reservoir had a high-water level in early August when ARG visited, but nevertheless they were able to identify a good range of drawdown species including Red Goosefoot *Chenopodium rubrum*, Water-pepper *Persicaria hydropiper*, Water-purslane *Lythrum portula*, and carpets of Silverweed *Potentilla anserina* and Corn Spurrey *Spergula arvensis*. The silvery form of Creeping Willow *Salix repens* var *argentea*, recorded in the past was still evident, along with other species.

In October BNB/CH checked the drawdown zone on Lindley Wood reservoir which was really extensive at the time and looking quite green with evolving vegetation on the dried-out surface. There were thousands of Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, a specialist drawdown plant and fascinating to see in such

huge numbers. There was a drawback though - it was fruiting time, and their fruits are often known as 'beggarticks' as they have two or more tough barbed bristles which attach themselves firmly to most items of clothing and take ages to pull off afterwards! Other typical drawdown specialists were recorded including the tiny Mudwort *Limosella aquatica*. Our visit was well-timed as a couple of days later after heavy rains the reservoir filled up completely, covering up all traces of the drawdown zone and emphasising just how precarious is the habitat of these specialised plants.



Beggarticks, Washburn Valley

## Otley area

In a corner of Leeds Road, Otley just beyond the East Chevin Road turn-off BNB's attention was drawn to a pale pink flowering colony of a Willowherb. It was glandular and had cuneate leaves with petioles 5-8mm long suggesting Pale Epilobium *roseum*, and confirmed by checking the fruits which were uniformly papillose and with no 'end lump'. There are only a few old WNS records for it, the last in 2001. Further up Leeds Road at the pavement / wall edge were some plants of Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis* and the yellow-flowered Annual Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis muralis*, both rather uncommon for us.

One of the successes of 2023 was the coming together of local communities to crowdfund and purchase Weston Woods (East Wood on the map), about a mile northwest of Otley, and comprising around 20 acres of deciduous woodland, popular with local people and rich in wildlife. Whilst the legal process was taking time to complete, BNB took the opportunity for a closer look round. It is essentially broad-leaved woodland on millstone grit which has been much quarried sometime in the past. Underlying soils are neutral/acidic, a typical woodland type, but becoming more acidic where rock

reaches the surface. There are no water courses in the wood. A vehicle track gives access to a fenced waterworks area, and both provide more disturbed ground attractive to some ruderal species and aliens.



Epilobium roseum

The mature woodland is dominated by sycamore and Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra*, along with some Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Beech, Ash, and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*. One large sycamore gave a measured girth of 4.23 metres. The understorey has frequent elder, hawthorn and occasional holly; hazel is rare. Areas with more recently planted trees include rowan, oak, birches, cherry and apple. Some clumps of Rhododendron look attractive in flower but need keeping under control. The ground flora is best in spring with dominant swathes of Ramsons *Allium ursinum* and Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, plus some Wood Anemone and Celandines *Ficaria verna*. Under the summer fully developed tree canopy the flora becomes restricted to Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*, Wood Speedwell *Veronica montanum*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Wood Dock *Rumex sanguineus*, brambles and Dryopteris ferns. Bracken occurs under the less-shading younger trees with Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis* and Climbing Corydalis *Ceratocarpus claviculata*. The acidic quarried area is sparser in vegetation with Wavy Hair-grass *Avellana flexuosa* and Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. There is open access, and the wood is particularly attractive in spring time.

The Otley Bridge flood defence scheme was mentioned in last year's Review and continues to show vegetation changes. Last autumn's riot of colour from garden seed-mix annuals was gone, apart from a few stragglers. Instead, there was a good sward of Black Bent grass *Agrostis gigantea* with occasional clumps of Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, White Campion *Silene latifolia* and Pale Persicaria *Persicaria lapathifolia* among more common species. Common

Cudweed *Filago germanica* re-appeared after a few years' absence, and later on there were some plants of Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare*, Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides* and a variety of Yellow Oat grass *Trisetum flavescens* var. *purpurascens*. Some of these are rather unusual for our area but may have arisen from imported soil in the earthworks.



Bee Orchid. Credit: Jo Peters

NDF recorded Bugle *Ajuga reptans* in Otley Plantation, part of the Farnley Estate, a new SE24D tetrad record. Meanwhile, JP/HMB/SW visited the small meadow off Yorkgate on the Chevin top in mid-June to find 8 flowering spikes of Bee Orchid. It has been recorded previously but numbers come and go, and this must be the best year yet, so credit to the Chevin Forest management team for their successful mowing regime in the meadow.

## Burley and Menston

In May BNB led a Nats Tuesday evening Burley Tree Walk, which a dozen members attended on a cloudy somewhat cool evening. It was followed afterwards by many of us enjoying a social drink in the Red Lion, a feature introduced by IB as a 'Botany, Banter and Beer Walk', and seems to be popular. The walk starting at the Round House was based on a Burley Summer Festival event devised last year (see 2022 Review). We discussed the trees along a route through Grange Park and down Back Lane to the Village Green and fountain. A recce of the route was also carried out with David Asher and Alison Tetley who are planning to put together a Burley Tree Trail, maybe similar in format to the Ilkley Tree Trails and hopefully available in 2024.

In Menston just below the Fox roundabout on Otley Road two fields were put up for sale, so being of interest to MANT the opportunity was taken to make a plant survey with Francesca Bridgwater/SW/BNB in May. Our survey showed both fields (currently used for sheep grazing) to be relatively unimproved neutral grassland with lots of Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Sweet- vernal *Anthoxanthum odoratum* grasses, Field Woodrush *Luzula campestris*, Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Pignut *Conopodium majus* and Lanceolate Plantain

*Plantago lanceolata*. The boundary hedgerows contained typical trees and shrubs - hazel, hawthorn, cherry, elder, rowan, Goat Willow *Salix caprea* and the ground flora included Wood Avens, Bluebells, Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, etc. There were some mature Pedunculate Oak trees - two were measured with girths 3.74m & 3.40m and the former accepted as a 'Notable tree' in Woodland Trust's ATI; also Ash and Alder and a large area of Crack Willow *S. x fragilis* scrub. The lower field was of particular interest for its extensive wetter area on the east side near the stream, with a number of wetland species including Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, Red Campion *Silene dioica*, Wood Forget-me-not *Myosotis sylvatica*, Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, Bugle and Ragged-robin *Silene flos-cuculi*. Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* was also getting a hold here. In the event MANT did not go through with a purchase, but with strings attached it is hoped that planning permission for building houses will not easily be attained.

Later in summer SW surveyed the wide roadside verge outside the Otley Road fields mentioned above, recording about 50 mostly common species, but including Hemlock *Conium maculatum* and Fiddleneck *Amsynckia micrantha*. SW also did MANT surveys for the tennis courts area of Menston Park (34 species) and grassy areas by the lane outside High Royds Cemetery (31 species).

## Denton and Middleton

In January WNS members were invited to a workshop at Denton Park to learn how to assess old trees suitable for addition to Woodland Trust's 'Ancient Tree Inventory' (ATI), a web archive covering trees from all over Britain. Around a dozen of us came along to be trained by Ros Evans, an experienced verifier, who explained how to recognise and assess suitable trees for the Inventory, and to upload the data onto the ATI website. We then began practical surveying on estate trees learning how to measure and record tree girths, check for dead wood in the tree and on the ground, assess hollows and broken limbs, and look for evidence of insects, mammals, birds, plant/moss epiphytes, 'cuckoo' trees and fungi.

The ATI recognise three categories for old trees - 'Ancient', 'Veteran' and 'Notable', based on a combination of the above features. Ancient trees are usually several centuries old, have very wide trunks, low stature having lost their taller limbs, often hollow trunked and are a rich wildlife habitat. Veteran trees are not as old, with less wide trunks but showing some signs of wounds or decay which may be environmentally induced rather than just to old age, but still of interest to wildlife and fungi, etc. Notable trees are fully mature specimens that stand out from their neighbours, large trunked and often with magnificent crowns, but less likely to have

broken limbs or signs of decay. The conservation minded Estate were keen to have all the large trees in their parkland and woodland habitats assessed for the ATI. We helped surveying on further visits and SS gave the final tally as no Ancient, 38 Veteran and 43 Notable trees. The main species were oak, followed by Beech, Ash and Sycamore, and smaller numbers of Alder, Horse Chestnut, lime and Birch. Two conifers a Wellingtonia *Sequoiadendron giganteum* and an Austrian Pine *Pinus nigra* made it as Notables.

Further visits to Denton Park included an April botany meeting surveying plants in the Hundwith Beck valley (see meetings section), and then in summer WNS members assisted YPP on two moorland surveys in July and August, with botany members tending to concentrate on identifying plant/moss species in the quadrats set up at each site. The areas covered were on previously heather-burnt moorland east of Crow Well Shooting House (5 plots) and High Moss above Dearncomb Head (5 plots). Each plot consisted of a 10 x 10 metre square in which general vegetation types were recorded (to be recognisable from an overhead drone photograph) and a 2 x 2 metre square in which every plant/moss species was recorded in detail including % cover and frequency. Additionally, peat depths were measured, and dip-wells installed to monitor water table heights at the plots.



Peat surveying with Yorkshire Peat Partnership. credit: Bruce Brown

Heather was the dominant vegetation in various states of recovery after burning ceased several years previously, along with smaller amounts of Bilberry, Crowberry, Cotton-grasses, and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Some cranberry was occasionally seen. Mosses were common as an under layer, but sphagnum species were generally small in extent, and it will be interesting to see if their coverage builds up over the years ahead, which would indicate improving condition of the moorland. On our way up to Denton Moor MJC spotted yellow flowers by the ditch alongside the track near High Denton Farm. On closer inspection they were identified as Trailing St John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum* with quite a few clumps on the wet ditch bank, and not that common in Wharfedale. Further south the track crosses Hob Beck where other records have been collected, including Marsh Ragwort *Jacobaea aquatica*, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, and earlier in the year snowdrops and celandines.

On a lovely sunny February day BNB/CH



headed from Middleton into Fairy Dell, a scenic wooded spot where the path crosses Bow Beck Gill, and not visited for several years. We re-found older records for Soft Shield-fern and Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium*. The gametophyte form of Killarney Fern *Trichomanes speciosum*, first recorded in 2005, was still present as a 'green fuzz' under the overhanging rocks of a fall pool. So, expecting to find more of interest, BNB returned in July to add Betony *Betonica officinalis*, Bugle, Tufted Forget-me-not *Myosotis laxa* and many others. On the climb up to Hollingley Farm a boggy ditch was passed with Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum*, Blinks *Montia fontana*, Toad Rush *Juncus bufonius* and Marsh Foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*.

The path reaches Denton Moor with the valley enclosing Dearncomb Beck on one's left side. The track going west drops down to cross the beck and interesting finds around here included Small-flowered Crane's-bill *Geranium pusillum*, Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum* and Peppermint *Mentha x piperita*. On a later visit, BNB kept to the moor on paths north to arrive at Dearncomb Head, a semi-circularcombe where spring-like flushes appear and gradually coalesce into the beginnings of Dearncomb Beck. There must be some calcareous influence in the flushes here judging by the biodiversity of species present compared with the typical surrounding moorland acidic heath. To name just one or two, there was Common Spotted-orchid, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris* and Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, and it is intended to hold a WNS botany meeting here in 2024.

## Ilkley area

BBG's first visit of the year in late March was led by IB along the riverside from the Lido carpark. Our first stop was the football field west of New Brook Street to find Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea* in excellent condition where it lives under the shade of a few beech trees. Despite being in a sports field and alongside a busy path it was doing remarkably well here with lots of well-grown plants displaying their greenish-yellow flowers. We retraced our steps keeping east along the north bank of the river and noting another *Gagea* plant near the three big Black Poplars *Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*. We passed the suspension bridge noting Highclere Holly *Ilex x altaclerensis*, Hard Shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum* and Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* along the way. Sweet Violet was found on the river edge and further on Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites* occupied a mossy boulder. We turned up Carter's Lane for a short way then took the path west back towards Ilkley. A highlight for the day here was Salmonberry *Rubus spectabilis* in flower.

BNB recce'd Middleton Woods for a meeting with the Harrogate Nats (HDNS) in May, confirming Large Bittercress *Cardamine amara*



Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem

and Greater Spearwort *Ranunculus lingua* in a small carr area in the western woods, after first suspecting something of interest on an earlier winter visit. On the HDNS meeting around 8 members met on a sparkling sunny day and we visited known sites for Goldilocks *R. auricomus*, Thin-spiked Wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*, various ferns including Soft Shield-fern and the Killarney Fern gametophyte and enjoyed the beauty of the trees in their fresh green foliage. Bluebells were still present but past their best by now in this warm dry spring. Also, in May ML reported that the American Skunk-cabbage *Lysichiton americanus* had re-appeared at Ilkley Tarn, growing large and flowering. Last time BNB spoke to Richard Perham, Bradford Met, he said he would monitor it and remove as necessary, so let's see what comes up in 2024.

LJW led us on a June evening BBG meeting up Spicey Gill on Ilkley Moor by the old Keighley Road. It was essentially a bryophyte meeting, and the features of 19 mosses and liverworts were explained. However, a number of flowering plants were of interest. A large shrub of Prickly Heath *Gaultheria mucronata* notable for its mucronate leaf tips was a substantial presence amongst heather. Higher up as we approached the old Grainings Head quarry was a good acidic wet flush with 5 sedge species, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Marsh Willowherb *Epilobium palustre* and Round-leaved Sundew.

In Ben Rhydding Gravel Pit SP reported finding a Twayblade *Neottia ovata* growing in the official reserve, the second record since 2007. It does grow sometimes on the neighbouring angler's site, and a big colony was found in 2021, so maybe they are on the increase. BNB/CH visited on a lovely November day enjoying lunch by the angler's lagoon gazing on the colourful autumnal reflections from the trees on the far side. Galingale was still present, the colony of Marsh Fern *Thelypteris palustris* in the far corner was doing well along with Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, and we re-found Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, but did not spot any Ostrich Fern. On a clockwise circuit round the official reserve there were lots of Evening Primrose *Oenothera x fallax* and Teasel *Dipsacus fullanum* to see, but the Inland Club-rush *Bolboschoenus laticarpus* identified by Michael Wilcox a few years back seems to have gone.

The Friends of Ilkley Cemetery approached SS to check out a potential tree trail around the cemetery, and BNB/CH joined in for an October walk round. There were inevitably many

Yews, Lawson's Cypress *Cupressus lawsoniana* cultivars and Portugal Laurel *Prunus lusitanica*, but we were pleasantly surprised to build up a good number of different species, common trees like Beech, Ash and Sycamore, but also more interesting species such as Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata*, Bishop Pine *Pinus muricata*, Maidenhair Tree *Ginkgo biloba* and Kashmir Whitebeam *Sorbus cashmiriana*. So with over 40 trees found there is enough to go ahead with a trail, which when more background information and photos are obtained, SS plans to complete in 2024. Incidentally the tree trail being devised by Chris Forshaw in Ben Rhydding, mentioned in last year's Review, has now been published as 'Ilkley Tree Trail No.5 Ben Rhydding' and is a comprehensive 16-page booklet covering 45 species. It is available free locally or online as with the other Tree Trails and well worth obtaining.



Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits, Autumn

## Addingham area

HMB/NV surveyed the southern corner field Sandbeds, below Low Mill, particularly along the riverbank, finding 60 plant species, many of them new post 2020 records. NV was pleased to find Restharrow *Ononis repens* at the top of the riverbank, and also a couple of Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum* plants at the road edge, but they were struggling in amongst brambles and briars that were spreading across the path. Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* which is uncommon in Wharfedale has been known to NV here for years at the roadside, but there was quite a lot of it in the field as well. Other interesting species on the list were Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and Yellow Oat-grass.

BNB chatted to a friendly fisherman and was allowed to walk the private path alongside Chelker Reservoir adjacent to the main A65, and an opportunity to look for wetland and aquatic species. There were Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia*, Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Common Spike-rush, Whorled Mint *Mentha x verticillata* and in muddy shallows Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora*. Along the A65 verge occasional plants of Dittander, Greater Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella major* and Perennial Sowthistle *Sonchus arvensis* were noted. Danish Scurvygrass *Cochlearia danica* is a common roadside halophyte, but much rarer for us is Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis*, seen on the descent towards Addingham and

recognisable by its narrow almost linear leaves. Further west at Draughton the path from the A65 up to Draughton Height crosses an interesting wetland area with Common Valerian, Water Avens *Geum rivale*, Ragged-robin and Tufted Forget-me-not. In the natural grassland above was Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, Pale Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla xanthochlora*, Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, etc.



Shoreweed Credit: Bruce Brown

In Heathness Gill the unidentified sedge mentioned in last year's Review turned out to be a lush specimen of Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica*. BNB/CH explored paths from West Hall towards Langbar finding a few plants of Soft Shield-fern in the steep ravine around Black Foss. Back in 2005 Hard Shield-fern was found here but has now gone and replaced by its fellow species. Soft Shield-fern does seem to be recorded more often now, so maybe is on the increase. Meanwhile further west near Halton East HMB/ML/SW came upon a large population of Moschatel, all along the eastern verge of the lane heading north from the A59, a lovely find. HMB also mentioned a crab apple tree in Riddings Lane above Addingham, near the ruin of High Laithe, which will be added to BNB's Crab Apple Survey if it continues in 2024.

## Mid Wharfedale

HMB/SW arranged our botany visit to Kex Beck in May (see meeting report) but returned in August to add Climbing Corydalis and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, and Blue Sowthistle *Cicerbita macrophylla* in flower at Hill End. SW found Restharrow on the riverbank near the Cavendish Pavilion which was not seen on our May BAE field survey, and there was another large patch away from the riverside (where we had recorded Betony in May). Nearer the Stepping Stones where the path drops down from Storiths SW also recorded Hard Shield-fern, occasionally seen in this area. Also, in May ARG took the track to Lower Barden Reservoir noting many Ivy-leaved Crowfoot *Ranunculus hederaceus* in the ditch alongside. On the drier parts of the path-sides there were hundreds of

Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca* and Common Dog-violet.

Other 2023 visits in mid Wharfedale from Bolton Abbey to Hebden were for tetrad recording and mentioned here are just a few highlights. Beamsley Moor, uniform heather moorland, only gave 50 species but it was interesting to explore the small spring flushes above Kex Beck and seek out Creeping Forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda*, Marsh Pennywort and New Zealand Willowherb *Epilobium brunescens*. Around Bolton Abbey railway station and over Bolton Bridge to Beamsley in April was colourful with Cowslips *Primula veris*, Common Vetch *Vicia sativa*, Sweet Violet and the blueish 'Robinsoniana' variety of Wood Anemone on the riverbank. At one spot along the way heaps of earth and animal tracks were noted, suggesting active badger presence. Appletreewick was re-visited in March to confirm Garden Arabis *Arabis caucasica* growing on village walls, and along the riverside path were Large Bittercress, Ivy-leaved Speedwell *Veronica hederifolia* and Hairy Violet *Viola hirta*. Skyreholme to Howgill paths were explored in May. The full length of Howgill Lane and the track down to the road were very species rich with 130 records and as a bonus a cuckoo called. Hebden village was also visited in spring and Few-flowered Leek *Allium paradoxum* was everywhere. Sanicle and Pignut were re-found by the waterfall up Hebden Beck.

## Grassington area

In Grass Wood NDF reported over 110 plants of Lily-of-the-Valley *Convallaria majalis* on Dewbottom Scar and 100 spikes of Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* in the lower part of the Wood. Helen Lefevre, a contemporary of Joan Duncan and keen fellow botanist, made many records in Grass Wood around the 1970-80's and was noted for her artistic ability too. The drawing of Herb Paris, reproduced here, is one of hers. In June BNB/CH came across a marsh-orchid in flower, growing by the junction of paths in the large grassy clearing at the Wood's centre. NB agreed it to be a Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. They did occur here before in 2000-2005, sometimes slightly hybridised with Common Spotted-orchids which grow nearby. The junction was churned up during conifer felling operations for several years, but is now naturally restored, so great to see the orchid's return. A little later BNB/CH continued through Bastow Wood and descended into the ravine of Dib Beck Head to add a few more tetrad records. The polypodies on the crag sides were wilting through lack of water, but this is their defence mechanism, and they soon bounce back when the rains return. As recorded in 2004, they are mostly Shivas' hybrid *Polypodium x shivasiae* along with some Southern Polypody *P. cambricum*. Despite the drought there were many plants of Jacob's-ladder *Polemonium caeruleum* in flower on the vegetated scree, one of its best locations for this rare native species.



Baneberry Credit: Bruce Brown

NDF recorded Giant Bellflower *Campanula latifolia* on Wood Lane, Skirethorns, whilst BNB in nearby Threshfield Quarry noted more than 30 plants of Rustyback *Asplenium ceterach* growing on a limestone outcrop just above the lower quarry floor. Numbers must have doubled here in the last few years. Further up in woodland the colony of Herb Paris was still doing well. In July BNB carried on up Wood Lane and towards Bordley to reach the heights above, where there was an extensive area of limestone pavement. Some Rigid Buckler-fern *Dryopteris submontana* was spotted but the star prize had to be the numerous and luxurious plants of Baneberry *Actaea spicata* populating the plateau, both in flower and some producing berries, initially green but soon turning black.



Herb Paris by Helen Lefevre

The lower lying ground linking Linton, Threshfield, Threapland (near Cracoe) and over to Thorpe has been explored on a few visits this year by BNB and CH. The environs of Crook Beck and Mires Beck on the opposite side of the road to Swinden Quarry have some interesting wetland areas adjacent to the footpath from Threapland to Linton with Spearmint *Mentha spicata*, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and four sedges, including the less common Brown Sedge *Carex disticha*. Deeper water



by the footbridge had underwater masses of Various-leaved Water-starwort *Callitriche platycarpa*. A big layby on the narrow back road, Thorpe Lane, makes a good start point for exploration, with a patch of Melancholy Thistle *Cirsium heterophyllum* nearby. BNB/CH took the path to Elbolton Hill, a reef knoll where the limestone rock breaks through the mostly mundane grass pasture hereabouts into small scars and scree bearing a more interesting calcicolous flora, with Blue Moor-grass *Sesleria caerulea*, Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, Parsley-piert *Aphanes arvensis* and Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia*. Nearer the summit amongst old mining remains were Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Spring Sandwort *Sabulina verna* and Hard Shield-fern sheltering in a pothole.

Linton Falls car park is another good start point. BNB/CH botanised the riverside paths upstream to Threshfield and downstream to Linton Church and beyond to Linton with its attractive village green, all with rich plant diversity, and an area we plan to visit on a botany meeting in 2024. Suffice it to say for now that we recorded over 200 species on our mid-August day. Only a part of Cracoe Fell is within our WNS boundary, but lying on the crossover between limestone and gritstone rocks its springs and flushes enrich the otherwise typical moorland plants. BNB found Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, Sneezewort, Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustre*, Flea Sedge and Sundew. A big Forget-me-not clump at a spring head was considered to be the sterile Pale x Creeping hybrid *Myosotis x bollandica*. Higher up in the ravine of Threapland Gill on rock outcrops were Fir Clubmoss *Huperzia selago*, and Green Spleenwort *Asplenium viride* hiding in crevices.

## Upper Wharfedale

On a lovely sunny May morning BNB/CH followed the Knipe Scar path for some way heading south from Kettlewell Bridge. The first part appears newly made allowing one to avoid the busy road, before linking into the original route. By the 'Welcome to Kettlewell' sign was a shrub of Fly Honeysuckle *Lonicera xylosteum*, probably planted. A small frond of Limestone Oak-fern *Gymnocarpium robertianum* was found hiding under a boulder as we ascended the rocky path below Knipe Scar. We got as far as a group of 8 Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* then returned after lunch for part two of our walk along the riverside path on the west bank. A sedge species at the water edge had two stigmas confirming Slender Tufted-sedge *Carex acuta*, and growing with Marsh-marigold, Angelica, and Common Valerian. A wet flush further on produced Bird's-eye Primrose *Primula farinosa* and Marsh Hawksbeard *Crepis paludosa*. Meanwhile NDF were north of Kettlewell at Park Rash in June, near the road summit seeing an estimated 2000 plants of Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea*, 200 Early-purple Orchids, 30 Bird's-eye Primrose and 10 Common Spotted-orchids - quite a sight!

The footpath from Kettlewell to Starbotten on the east side of the dale passes through the scattered trees of Cross Wood. Here in May NDF came across 200 Primroses *P. vulgaris* with a few Cowslips and one False Oxlip *P. x polyantha* hybrid. They also spotted Mountain Melick *Melica nutans* grass and more Early-purples. BNB explored the west side of the dale above Starbotten reaching Fosse Gill Pot where the stream disappears down a deep slit in the ground. The sheltered edge of the pot was a luxurious haven for Wood Crane's-bill *Geranium sylvaticum*, Smooth Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla glabra* and Green Spleenwort. The path up through woodland at Bounty was 'bountiful' with Sanicle, Dewberry *Rubus caesius*, Stone Bramble *R. saxatilis* and much more. Some Aspen *Populus tremula* were noted amongst the hazel and ash.

The National Plant Monitoring Scheme square on Kirk Gill Moor above Hubberholme managed by BNB/RP/TR is in full operation again after the Covid interruptions with visits in June and late August. This is the sixth year of recording since 2018, and 2023 is the first year we have found Heather *Calluna vulgaris* growing in two of our 'blanket bog' plots, just small patches so far. The ground does seem less boggy with recent summer drought periods and maybe the appearance of heather is a consequence of this. The purpose of the scheme is long term monitoring to check for any vegetation changes due to climate or change of habitat management. On the way back from our June survey we had time to call in at the Scargill Centre near Kettlewell and look round their woodland for an hour before enjoying a welcome 'cuppa'. The colony of Northern Bedstraw *Galium boreale* is still doing well as is the population of polypody on the crag above, re-confirmed as the Shivas hybrid.

Beckermonds and Oughtershaw are getting close to the head of Upper Wharfedale and have been fruitful for botanical records in the past, so BNB explored two tetrads there, using a helpful layby just uphill from the Beckermonds road junction as a start point. On the roadside to Oughtershaw there were lots of species including some patches of Melancholy Thistle. It was fascinating to re-find Livelong Saxifrage *Saxifraga paniculata* well naturalised on a small limestone outcrop, just as described by Phyl Abbott in her VC64 Plant Atlas, the record going back to 1989. The track towards Nethergill was colourful with the blue flowers and green sticky leaves of Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*. The hillside on the south side of Beckermonds was less plant rich, but a large colony of Flat Sedge *Blysmus compressus* was next to the river footbridge. A track into the forest was reached with a fox trotting unconcernedly ahead. Here was Sneezewort, Common Spotted-orchid, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and Hairy Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* by a small stream providing a gap in the coniferous canopy.



Livelong Saxifrage

The high tops along the watershed are great for scenic views but usually peaty and acidic underfoot with little species variety, although surprises can occur and become the highlight of the day. Middle Tongue trig point at 643 metres altitude and its neighbouring Tarn, north of Yockenthwaite, were home to Bog Asphodel, Cranberry and Cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus*. A limestone crag on the way down had some colonies of Hoary Whitlowgrass *Draba incana*, a fairly rare montane plant. Great Whernside at 704m approaches a more arctic/alpine habitat with masses of Stiff Sedge *Carex bigelowii*, small clumps of Fir Clubmoss on rocks,



Festuca vivipara

more Cloudberry and Viviparous Fescue *Festuca vivipara*. This grass produces new leafy shoots from its spikelets and makes for a good back-up in cold climates in case fertile seeds are not

set. Further south the summit ridge merges into Conistone Moor, with extensive lead mining remains, and good places to find Alpine Pennycress *Nocca caerulea* and Spring Sandwort.

## Littondale

We've been busy in Littondale this year with botany meetings at Weybecks Pasture and Arncliffe (see meeting reports), and more visits by other members. NDF checked Stonelands Cave near Litton for over-wintering moths in January, seeing 7 open flowers of Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*. In May it was primrose time, with 2000 estimated by them in Scoska Wood along with a handful of Cowslips and False-oxlips. Towards the end of May BNB/CH botanised along the river from Litton to Scoska. For much of the way the riverbed was bone dry enabling us to explore this novel habitat, looking up to plants on the bank rather than down on them from the path above. Good-King-Henry *Chenopodium bonus-henricus* and the hybrid Water x Wood Avens *Geum x intermedium* were seen. Some rarities in Scoska Wood were re-found - Herb Paris and Baneberry. NDF returned to Scoska in July recording 6 Common Spotted-orchids, 4 Giant Bellflower and 12 Fragrant Orchids, determined by NB as Marsh Fragrant *Gymnadenia densiflora*.

In June BNB visited Cowside Beck and Yew Cogar Scar above Arncliffe, a super-rich botanical area. It is not that easy to access as there is no direct public beck-side route, so best to park by the cattlegrid on the Malham road and drop down from there. A good line was fortuitously taken, coming directly onto small colonies of Mountain Everlasting *Antennaria dioica* and Mountain Avens *Dryas octopetala* on nearing the valley bottom. The latter is restricted to Cowside Beck in our area with some scattered colonies on the valley sides. Yew Cogar Scar has been studied for its polypodies in the past finding all three species and their hybrids, and most re-found today. Rock Whitebeams *Sorbus rupicola* adorn the steep crags, along with Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and a rare plant for BNB, the annual Wall Whitlowgrass *Draba muralis*, now in fruit but still showing its distinctive rounded and lobed leaves. One of the furthest outposts of our recording area in Littondale must be the eastern slopes of Penyghent which BNB explored from the Halton Gill Road, crossing moorland to reach the steep craggy slopes. Here is our only WNS location for Purple Saxifrage *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, hanging off the rocks, flowering now over in June, but recognisable by the dead heads and tiny leaves, white-spotted with lime exudate. Its associates were Lesser Meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and Hairy Rockcress *Arabis hirsuta*.

NDF made two visits to Sleets Gill fields south of Hawswick counting 150 cowslips and 170 Early-purple Orchids in May then a month

later came across three Dark-red Helleborines *Epipactis atrorubens* in a higher field amongst vegetated limestone scree, along with Green Spleenwort. A few of us, AS/LS/CH/BNB returned to see them in July along with any other orchids. In the lower field we re-found Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* by the gateway and the one patch of Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* on the slope above, nice to see again in flower and last recorded in 2015. The 'dark-reds' were still present, just asking to be photographed, along with scattered fragrant-orchids, considered to be Chalk Fragrant *Gymnadenia conopsea*. On the way back in the field nearest the road a few Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris* and Twayblade were still in flower.



*Draba muralis*

In mid-June NDF took the scenic path from Hawswick that climbs diagonally up the dale side to Hawswick Moor where there are old lead working remains, the ideal habitat for Mountain Pansy and Spring Sandwort. In one spot they estimated 4000 pansies and not far away another 2000 plus about 200 white starred sandworts at both sites. A few days later they were in Foxup, and by Cosh Beck found 30 plants of Melancholy Thistle and one hybrid Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza x venusta*, Northern Marsh x Common Spotted.

## Botany Section Field Trips

### Hazlewood and Kex Beck, 4 May

Leaders: Heather Burrow & Sarah Ward

Report by Heather Burrow and Bruce Brown

13 well wrapped up botanists set off promptly from our Hill End parking spot to reach the shelter of Kex Beck and escape the cold wind sweeping along the A59. We did manage to spot Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* leaves and Danish Scurvygrass on the road edge, a coastal species that has moved inland along salted roads. Having reached the shelter of the valley we could reduce our pace to the more usual gentle amble and check out the plants present, noting Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Common Dog-violet in a colourful mixture of late spring and early summer flowers. We were not alone here - a herd of young black and white cows formed an arc around us, looking on with curious intent at our movements. They would doubtless know the more interesting plants by taste!

The beck-side and adjacent flushes were quite plant rich, with Water Avens, Square-stalked St John's-wort, Bistort *Bistorta officinalis*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and many others. Over the footbridge, the path rises gradually to Howgill Farm and then as a track towards Ling Chapel. A number of conservation tree plantings alongside the path included alder, Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*, hawthorn and holly. Some wetter patches had Marsh-marigold, Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*, a pale green Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* grass, and perhaps the unlikely find of the day was a single Fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*, probably a garden escape. We took the path north from Ling Chapel Farm through a rushy pasture to the wooded edge of the Kex Beck valley, here a ravine with a steep path descending through heather, and a great lunch spot with views across to Deerstones.

In the bottom were drifts of Ramsons, Red Campion and Great Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, whilst on the Deerstones side a small wooded ravine was carpeted with Bluebells and Broad Buckler-fern. On reaching the cottages, our path turned west downstream soon into pasture fields, where there was a large patch of Yellow Pimpernel, along with Devil's-bit Scabious and Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*. On rougher ground on slopes and at field edges many primroses were still in flower. Both species of Golden-saxifrage, Opposite-leaved *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and Alternate-leaved *C. alternifolium* were present. As their names suggest they are distinguished by the placement of their stem leaves and the larger kidney-shaped leaf of the latter.

A path came out onto the A59 by the Almshouses, which appear to be well restored, and we wandered through the archway to look around and admire its architecture. Mural species growing in this area were White



Stonecrop *Sedum album*, Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*, Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber* and Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum*. We escaped the busy A59 onto the much quieter side road leading to Hill End, now in bright sunshine. The lane-side had good quantities of Shepherd's-purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* and a nice patch of Leopard's-bane *Doronicum pardalianches* was present, a known record and probably a garden escape. Other likely cast-offs doing well along the lane were Welsh Poppy, Phacelia *Phacelia tanacetifolia* (thanks to SSI for ID'ing this) and the distinctive leaves of Blue Sowthistle. On reaching the cars our heads were full of the plants and colours we'd seen in a good variety of habitats and our total today was 187 species.

## Kilnsey Park Nature Reserve, 25 May

**Leaders: Bruce Brown & Nicky Vernon**

BNB/CH first visited Kilnsey Park last year and found lots of botanical interest to make it a good venue for a WNS meeting, not least because of their re-introduced population of the spectacular Lady's-slipper Orchids *Cypripedium calceolus*. In the event it became a joint meeting with the BBG and 26 members from the two groups arrived at the fortunately large car park on a pleasant sunny morning. The Park is popular with visitors for fishing the lakes, children's attractions, farm animals and red squirrels (in a large cage), but once the entry fee was paid, we were free to wander around the estate. NV was kindly given a lift to the nature reserve and wildflower trail by the staff member, so our paths only crossed when she returned back as we slowly explored our way up.

The path started alongside the stream with Marsh-marigold, Monkeyflower *Erythranthe x robertsii*, Water Mint and Wintercress *Barbarea vulgaris*. Higher up were some planted beds mingling with naturalising species like Angelica, Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, Water Avens and Dame's-violet *Hesperis matronalis*. One puzzling plant was a purplish Fringed Loosestrife *Lysimachia ciliata* cultivar 'Firecracker' and there were spreading shuttlecocks of Ostrich Fern *Matteuccia struthiopteris*. We were now approaching the Nature Reserve famous for its orchids and the highlight of the Park. It is a sloping area of calcareous grassland with spring-fed stream runnels and seepages keeping the ground wet and boggy, but constantly base-rich, typified by such plants as Bird's-eye Primrose, Black Bogrush *Schoenus nigricans* Broad-leaved Cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium* and Few-flowered Spikerush *Eleocharis quinqueflora* as well as the orchids.

NV recalled that once it was possible to meander at will over the orchid meadow and in August 2001 the UWFS recorded a comprehensive list of plants there (159 species). But nowadays people are restricted to following a roped trail across the edge of the grassland, inevitable due to the wear and tear from large numbers of visitors. There are currently three clumps of Lady's-slipper situated in slightly drier

areas near the top of the field and next to the path. They were introduced from a Kew Gardens project using micro-propagation techniques of material taken from the one surviving Yorkshire wild colony. Kilnsey received plants in the early 2000s and they flowered for the first time in 2009. Our visit this year was timed to perfection with the plants in full flower, looking spectacular, showing-off their purple-brown twisted outer petals and bulbous yellow slipper lips.



Lady's-slipper Orchid

The Lady's-slippers though are not the only highlight of the meadow, and the reason for it becoming a nature reserve in 1986 was the presence of large numbers of marsh orchids - Common Spotted, Northern Marsh *Dactylorhiza purpurella*, Early Marsh *D. incarnata* and in particular the Narrow-leaved or Pugsley's Marsh-orchid *D. traunsteinerioides*, Kilnsey being its last surviving Yorkshire Dales population. On a separate visit BB/DT counted hundreds of the latter over the whole site in 2023, occasionally in view from the roped path, and potentially confusable with Northern Marsh especially when in bud. Also, marsh-orchids can readily hybridise, and hybrids between Pugsley's and Common Spotted are not uncommon according to BB - and a good candidate was seen by us. However, the really rare hybrid which occurs here is the Pugsley's x Early Marsh-orchid, and just one plant was found by BB/DT.

After the orchid highlights we continued up into woodland and lunched by the Holy Well named by the Cistercian monks from Fountains Abbey, a calcareous spring which feeds the orchid meadow and is the water supply for the fish farm. DT informed me that when the latter was planned, arrangements were agreed to divert the outflow down the edge of the site (the current stream) so leaving pristine spring water to flow through the meadow and preserve the numbers of orchids we see today. We explored the woodland to the top of the Estate, noting Hairy Rockcress on the boundary wall and lots of Pignut, before returning to the carpark and refreshments in the cafe.

## Ilkley Moor, near Cow & Calf, 8 June

**Leader: Bruce Brown**

14 members met at the layby east of the Cow & Calf Hotel on Hangingstones Road. It had been dry for the past three weeks and stayed so today but cloudy and cool until the sun broke through. Our first aiming point was the Pancake Stone, a large boulder on the skyline above. We stopped by a small man-made reservoir now fully vegetated with Water Horsetail and Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*. The horsetail is easily recognised by its completely hollow stems. We took the opportunity to remind ourselves of the common moorland plants and grasses associated with acidic peat, namely Wavy Hair-grass, Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, Mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, and the comparison of Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Creeping Soft-grass *H. mollis*. Herbs included Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and the shrubby plants of Heather, Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and Cross-leaved Heath.

On the steep slope just below the Pancake Stone grows a large spreading colony of Chickweed Wintergreen *Lysimachia europaea*, a typical Scottish pine-wood species and quite rare this far south in Wharfedale. It was first recognised in the early 2000s, and then apparently disappeared, only to be recorded again in 2020. Current numbers are around 1000 plants, and quite a few were still displaying their white starry flowers and distinctive leaf whorls on our June visit. See the 2020 Review for more detail.

From the Pancake Stone the gradient eased, and we climbed gradually towards Green Crag Slack. This area must have been busy with people during Neolithic times, making settlements in this area and responsible for the 'cup and ring' markings on stones and boulders, although nobody to this day knows exactly their purpose. Nowadays the area is covered in heather and bilberry heath with wetter patches containing Common *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Hare's-tail *E. vaginatum* Cotton-grasses, and a few sedges such as Common Sedge *Carex nigra* and Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*. ML spotted the pink flowers of Cranberry, their leaves still developing and pretty much hidden in the sphagnum moss.

We paused by a large gritstone boulder, noting the diminutive Early Hair-grass *Aira praecox* growing in cracks of the rock, and then by the path-side further on. At this time of year, it shows off its silvery green florets each with a pair of awns. In a short while we reached the Lanshaw Lass boundary stone and the eastern end of the Lanshaw Delves. DL explained that this landscape feature is a lateral moraine left by the glacier flowing down Wharfedale as it began to melt towards the end of the Ice Age. Amongst its deposited rubble of soil and clay were limestone rocks originating from Upper Wharfedale. Over the years limestone was valuable for making lime, and the remains of the

diggings and holes are visible today. One such gave a nice sheltered lunch spot for us.

Bright green grassy patches stood out clearly from the moorland heather cover and proved to be rich in plant species. The resident rabbits and sheep were obviously attracted to this more succulent fare, so the turf was very short, just a few centimetres tall, and tested our botanical skills in teasing out the identities of the various species present. We managed to record Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Lesser Trefoil *Trifolium dubium*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Dog Violet, Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* amongst others. Here and there were lovely flowering colonies of Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis*, Germander Speedwell *V. chamaedrys*, Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*. A highlight came when AS asked about a plant in the turf, then sitting right next to it was a single blade of Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* which would never have been noticed otherwise.



Adder's-tongue Fern

Below the Delves to the south, the ground descended to an area of bog at the head of High Lanshaw Dam. We spent a short while here checking for wetland plants which must be enjoying some calcareous enrichment seeping down. Thus, we saw Flea Sedge, Quaking Grass *Briza media* and lots of Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *L. pedunculatus*. In the wettest parts were White Sedge *C. canescens* and a water forget-me-not (either *M. secunda* or *M. x bollandica*).

We joined the flagged Dick Hudson's path to reach the headquarters of Backstone Beck. Several stonechats and reed warblers were calling from their bracken top perches and rush stems. Some roe deer were spotted as we dropped down passing the Stanza Stones Poetry Seat. ML encouraged us to make up a few lines based on plant names, but our efforts were not that poetical. A wet area by the beck gave us a nice patch of Creeping Forget-me-not, Bog

Stitchwort *Stellaria alsine* and Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. The 'birders' spotted two linnets.

Close to the top of the 'Cow' we found a lovely white flowered shrub of Tree Heather *Erica arborea* which our VC recorder DAB had first recorded as the cultivar 'Estelle Gold'. A rocky descent brought us to the foot of the 'Cow' next to its 'Calf'. In a large crack at the Cow's base grows a good colony of Beech Fern *Phegopteris connectilis*, rather unexpected in such an acidic grit area, but it must receive sufficient nutrients in its shaded bower to flourish. Just a short walk now brought us back to our parking layby. Ilkley Moor does not contain the plant diversity that one sees higher up the Dales, but nevertheless we had found a number of very interesting and unexpected species on a lovely day with fine views over Wharfedale.

### Arncliffe, North side, 27 July

Leader: Bruce Brown

On recent botany meetings to Arncliffe we've explored the hillsides on the south side of the dale, so this year we tackled the north side, following on from a tetrad survey by BNB/CH the previous year which showed some interesting plant habitats and very good species diversity. Littondale never disappoints us. 11 members met on Arncliffe village green on a warm muggy day, to be greeted by light drizzly showers and sunny spells, but not enough to worry about waterproofs.

After crossing the bridge over the River Skirfare, we entered the riverside meadow and started recording. The meadow was as yet uncut and a good range of neutral grassland species were seen, including Eyebright *Euphrasia* agg., Autumn Hawkbit *Scorzoneroides autumnalis*, Yellow Rattle, Common Knapweed and others. It was not far to the stile onto the Hawkswick road, but we took our time checking out the grasses and herbaceous plants. A short way along the road gave access to the riverbank, but with high water levels following rain there was not much above the water line to see, other than a Guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus* and a big Common Lime tree *Tilia x europaea*. The wall by the stile had the dead stalks of the early annual Rue-leaved Saxifrage and a living clump of Brittle Bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis*.

We entered grazed pastureland, its short turf packed with limestone loving plants such as Thyme-leaved Sandwort, Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, Meadow Oat-grass *Helictochloa pratensis*, Hairy Violet, Fairy Flax and many others. Gradually gaining height the path led us to the woodland below Park Scar. Here there were Bloody Crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum*, Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, and some splendid clumps of Carline Thistle *Carlina vulgaris* as we threaded our way through small outcrops and limestone scree, stopping to enjoy lunch and the spectacular views down to Arncliffe village. Hard Shield-fern, Wild Basil

*Clinopodium vulgare* and Woodruff *Galium odoratum* were seen as the path became steeper and a final climb up a rocky ravine brought us out onto the top of Park Scar and level grassy terrain.



Horseshoe Vetch

We got our breath back by taking a slow perusal of a couple of gully flushes, a chance to spot a few wet-loving species. There was Water Mint, Lesser Spearwort, Butterwort, then SSI spotted the tiny Lesser Clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides*, and nearby were Dioecious Sedge *Carex dioica* and Few-flowered Spikerush. Heading west we reached the foot of Brayshaw Scar but did not notice any extra species, so climbed higher to the next slightly taller scar further up the hillside. Here we were rewarded with the sight of several clumps of Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* growing on the scar face and out of reach of the sheep. It is a rare plant in our Wharfedale area with attractive yellow pea-shaped flowers and finely divided leaflets. Its fruits are very distinctive pods twisted into horseshoe shaped segments.

Descending down to lower levels and the bridleway gave us great views of Littondale as two cronking ravens passed overhead. More flushes appeared where we found the leaves of Bird's-eye Primrose and the insignificant flower spikes of Marsh Arrowgrass. The bridleway entered a lane zigzagging down the steep slopes. On the first bend the short turf was covered in Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *Geranium molle* and rocks were adorned with Parsley-piert. Further down a path led directly to Arncliffe Bridge. Our plant list for the day totalled over 160 species.

### Malham circular walk, 10 August

Leader: Bruce Brown

This, our last botany meeting of the season, was another lovely summer's day - we've been blessed on our outings this year. 11 of us met in the village car park ready to tackle a 5-mile circular walk via Janet's Foss and Malham Cove. We crossed Malham Beck by the footbridge and took the path downstream noting lots of Meadowsweet in flower and huge leaves of



Butterbur *Petasites hybridus*, the purple of Knapweed () and white flowers of Valerian () added colour, and a small pink Crane's-bill was identified as Dove's-foot *Geranium molle* after checking for its glabrous ridged fruits.

Now in a narrow lane the path headed towards the wooded ravine of Janet's Foss. A wetland area was dominated by large expanses of sedge, not in flower but known from previous visits to be Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*. Angelica, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* and a couple of Willowherb species, American *Epilobium ciliatum* and Hoary *E. parviflorum* were confirmed. As soon as we passed through the gate into the ravine, we encountered calcareous grassland plants with Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*, Water Avenas, umbels of Burnet Saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, and Quaking and Blue Moor grasses.

In the shaded cooler woodland ferns took on prominence - Male *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Hard Shield, Brittle Bladder, Maidenhair Spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*, and even Broad Buckler-fern which doesn't like limestone soil but grows around tree roots. *Polypodium* ferns were a feature of today's walk and Common Polypody *P. vulgare* grew happily on tree boughs and rock outcrops. LS pointed out a crag clothed along its top with a hybrid of *P. interjectum* x *P. cambricum*, called Shivas' Polypody *P. x shivasiae*, a rare hybrid confirmed on previous visits here. Many walkers passed us as we slowly botanised up the track to reach the fall pool below Janet's Foss waterfall, clustered with swimmers and their spectators. We decided to continue into the next field beyond and found a nice grassy bank in less populous surroundings for lunch.

Our path branched slightly west of the popular Gordale Scar route. Some nice clumps of Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans* with their large purple nodding heads were admired. Yellow Oat (A) and Meadow Oat (B) grasses were compared. The former is yellowish green with 3 fine awns per spikelet, and the latter a more robust grass with thicker longer awns and glaucous leaves with a pair of white 'tramlines'. We left the path to enter a narrow rocky ravine where more Polypody taxa had been determined in the past, notably Southern Polypody *P. cambricum* and the hybrids Manton's *P. x mantoniae* and the much rarer Font-queri's Polypody *P. x font-queri*. These occupied small ledges or cracks in the limestone crags, well out of sheep's reach. Lesser Meadow-rue was in excellent condition, along with Small Scabious, and the leaves of Rockrose and Horseshoe Vetch were spotted. A steep grassy slope was slowly surmounted onto the ravine top where another polypody colony was found - this was thought to be a hybrid taxon, probably Manton's, but introgressed towards Common Polypody.

We descended the Malham road for a short way then diverted onto a field path heading for the top of Malham Cove. Approaching the edge, we got spectacular views across the Cove and into the valley below. Peregrine falcons usually nest here but their young would no doubt have

flown by now. Two trees of Rock Whitebeam clung to the Cove edge, revealing their white leaf undersides in the cool breeze. We hopped our way carefully across the top of the Cove, classic limestone pavement with some deep grikes. A known Shield-fern hybrid *Polystichum x bicknellii* was re-found, and on the western side were some healthy clumps of Baneberry, displaying their fruiting berries. It is a scarce plant restricted to the limestone Pennines and parts of eastern Yorkshire.



Oat grasses

The steps took us to the bottom of the Cove, where there were great views of gymnastic rock climbers on the Cove face as we crossed the emerging river. A big clump of Intermediate Polypody *Polypodium interjectum* here was our final species of the full six polypody taxa seen today. It was rather wet and slippery to reach the stile and path beyond, where a little searching soon revealed the distinctive leaflets of Jacob's-ladder and one plant with blue petals and fruiting head was found. This was our last highlight of the day although a nice colony of Betony and Great Burnet was seen as we moved downstream and crossed the clapper-stone footbridge to join the well-used path back to Malham village. Over 180 species were recorded today.

## Surveys

### Denton Park Estate, Hundwith Beck survey, 20 April

Leader: Sue Stevens

Report by Sue Stevens

Our first visit to the Denton Estate, at the invitation of Nick Bailey, one of the new owners, saw 16 of us set off across the deer park to Hundwith Beck, a substantial stream running north-south down the eastern edge of the estate in a hidden ravine, taking water from the moor to the Wharfe.

There has been an estate at Denton for a very long time - written records go back to the 13thC. The most famous resident is Thomas Fairfax, Oliver Cromwell's chief in command during the civil war, born here in 1612. His family retained the hall until 1717, when it was sold to the Ibbetson family, who had obtained their wealth as cloth merchants in Leeds. One of the family, Henry Carr Ibbetson, became the first president of the Wharfedale Agricultural Society, founded in 1796, and specialised in breeding shorthorn cattle on the estate. The estate changed hands several times and in 1976 was bought by the engineering firm NG Bailey, who operated here until 2022, when the estate was bought by Nick Bailey and his brother Cal. They intend to rewild at least part of the 2500 acres and convert the Hall into a hotel. We are one of many groups that have been invited to survey what wildlife is present to help develop a rewilding plan.

The Hundwith Beck ravine has probably always been wooded, though few ancient trees remain. The lower part, by the shooting shelters, where we started our survey is mostly young, mainly planted, mixed broadleaf and conifer woodland. Our route followed a track that climbed gently up through the wood alongside the beck. Plenty of woodland and beck-side plants were noted, including big colonies of Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*. Large areas were dominated by bluebells or ramsons, and patches of wood anemones occurred suggesting long-established or ancient woodland. Lunch was by a bluebell bank and then several fords crossed as we continued upstream.

We passed through a more open area used for pheasant rearing in the past, and the woodland became more conifer-dominated in the upper part, including a larch plantation. At the top of the wood, we found some Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* that may be the food source for the several brimstone butterflies we saw. On our descent we passed through a wonderful, boggy alder carr with marsh marigold, golden saxifrage and brooklime.

In total we recorded 124 plant species, including a few extras added when on a tree survey the following day. In addition, Andy Woodall found us a variety of fungi, including St George's mushroom, so called as it is said to appear on the saint's day - 2 days after our visit, and we also saw a variety of butterflies and bees, birds of prey, roe deer, hares and sunshine all day.

## Bolton Abbey Estate Survey, Cavendish to Pickles Gill, 11 May

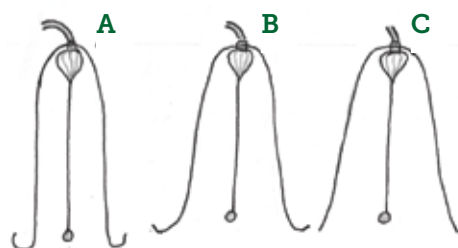
Leader: Bruce Brown

Some heavy rain on the drive up to Bolton Abbey seemed rather ominous but it turned out to be just a shower, and brighter skies greeted us as we reached the Cavendish car park. And so it turned out to be a typical spring day with warm sunshine and a few showers. Everywhere was a very bright green, the grass and fresh leaf foliage, interspersed with blue hazes of bluebells, white stitchworts and yellow celandines and buttercups.

We had arranged with Mark Jeffery, the Estate Forester, to visit Pickles Gill woodland for this year's survey, but he also suggested we might like to check out the field on the east side of the river opposite, which the Estate had left fallow for a couple of years, with no grazing, cropping or fertiliser application. 10 members arrived and we crossed the Wooden Bridge, noting a single spike of Toothwort in the lane beyond.

Entering the field, we started recording, initially by the beck-side with lots of Meadowsweet, Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes* and Large Bittercress. Along the riverbank were aniseed-scented Sweet Cicely *Myrrhis odorata*, Dog's Mercury and Lord's-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum*. The meadow grasses were just starting to display their flowering spikes, notably Sweet Vernal, Meadow Foxtail, Red Fescue and Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*. Notable herbs were Pignut, Great Burnet and Wood Forget-me-not. Some rather tall plants of Spring Sedge *Carex caryophylla* were found, Betony leaves aplenty, as well as Common Knapweed, Pale Lady's-mantle and Barren Strawberry. Our species count was going well.

Some bluebells were present and in one spot we could make a direct comparison of native *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (A), garden hybrid *H. x massartiana* (B) and one that was most likely to be a Spanish Bluebell *H. hispanica* (C). Natives have narrow tube-shaped flower 'bells' with reflexing tips and tending to hang to one side of the stem. Spanish ones have wider flared bell ends without reflexing tips, hanging equally around a much stouter stem and with wide leaves at least an inch across. They are less hardy in our more northerly latitudes, so much more common in gardens is the hybrid between the two. This shows intermediate characters but being fully fertile can back-cross, and is the one more likely to naturalise itself in the wilds.



We worked our way to the eastern end of the field then passed through the gate into woodland alongside Pickles Gill where it joins the river. Here were typical woodland species with Broad Buckler-fern, Hard Shield-fern, Wood Speedwell, Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and Common Dog-violet. We crossed the road by the ford to enter the private part of Pickles Gill where we had permission to survey. But first we stopped for lunch on a nice bank overlooking the flowing gill, a very pleasant spot surrounded by ramsons, wood anemone, red campion etc.

The woodland contained mostly broad-leaved tree species, principally Sycamore, wych Elm and beech plus occasional ash, Holly and Larch. The beck meandered from side to side along its steep-sided ravine, necessitating several crossings and the probability of wet feet as we progressed upstream. Moschatel became very common, and both Opposite-leaved and Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrages were noted in wetter flushes. Ferns were common, especially Male and Lady Ferns *Athyrium filix-femina*, Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*, and SSi spotted Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*. Last year's dry summer had resulted in a heavy mast for some trees, now apparent as masses of young seedlings of sycamore and beech that had sprung up all over the woodland floor. The first pair of leaves, the cotyledons, differed from the true leaves which follow on, and the Beech in particular is quite distinctive with broad cotyledons.



Beech seedling

On reaching a large bush of Bird Cherry in full bloom we decided to return, looking for an easier route back alongside the west side boundary wall, once we'd made the steep ascent to the top of the ravine. We re-crossed the morning's survey field at a higher level noting Wild Strawberry, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, a crab apple and the new whorls of Great Horsetail as extras for our list. On getting back to the Cavendish Pavilion, some of us stayed on for a welcome cuppa or ice-cream in the cafe.

Looking back over the day, we recorded 83 species in Pickles Gill of which 23 can be considered as Ancient Woodland Indicators, many of them dominating the woodland floor,

and good evidence for the woodland being truly 'ancient'. Our last WNS survey there was in 2010 with the majority of records then the same as today, showing good constancy over the years. The field survey gave 122 records, mostly neutral grassland species with some plants of damper flushes and stream/riverbanks. A quarter of these would be rated by North Yorks County Council as notable species in their SINC sites (Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation) which represents a high conservation value for this field.

## Bogridge Farm Survey, near Huby, 15 June

Leaders: Rob & Emma Burnett

Jeff Davitt our Society Treasurer and Chair of the Yorkshire Rewilding Network suggested we might like to visit Bogridge Farm, near Huby, which lies close to our WNS eastern boundary in an area not visited before on a botany meeting. Its owners Rob and Emma Burnett have joined the Network and intend to rewild their 100-acre farm which has been with tenants for 20 years but taken back in hand by them at the start of 2023. Arrangements were made and 12 members arrived at the farm on another hot and sunny summer's day and were given a warm welcome by Rob and Emma. The farm had previously been used for cattle and sheep rearing with some haymeadows, but from the beginning of 2023 no stock has been present and the land allowed to rewild. Eventually they intend to bring in some Longhorn cattle and maybe one or two pigs and see how things go from thereon.

Rob and Emma led us south through meadows tall with grasses. These fields had never been ploughed, re-seeded, or sprayed, so very much a natural environment. We soon counted 12 different grass species along with white clover and mouse-ear chickweed. A ditch line along a field edge had been widened and fenced off to make a wildlife corridor, planted up with some alder, dogwood, rowan and guelder-rose, now developing into a thicket. Some oak had self-seeded and a handsome Red Snake-bark Maple *Acer capillipes* introduced. We reached the lower meadows bordering Riffa Beck which can become quite wet with temporary areas of standing water in winter but were bone-dry in the current heat wave of our visit. Nevertheless, some interesting wet loving plants were found including Common Spikerush, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Compact *Juncus conglomeratus* and Hard Rush *J. inflexus*, Sweet-grasses *Glyceria fluitans*, *G. notata*, and a few plants of Common Spotted-orchid were nice to find.

On returning to the farmyard, we found a few weedy species in the gravelly paths by the barns, such as Field Forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis*, Wall Speedwell *Veronica arvensis*, Barren-brome *Anisantha sterilis* and Shining Crane's-bill. Botanists cannot resist weedy spaces and patches of waste ground - you never know what might turn up! Emma put the kettle on and a



mug of tea with our packed lunch was very much appreciated, and the provision of scones and cake definitely spoilt us, for which much thanks.

We followed the access road east and on to the slopes of Round Hill. The shorter grassland here was dominated by Red Fescue, Sweet Vernal-grass and the emerging heads of Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Flowers noted were Cat's-ear, Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and Field Woodrush. We dropped down through gorse bushes into a small valley which normally has a running spring, but dry today, then headed for Bailey's Whins Wood, giving some shady respite from the sun. The trees were mainly well-developed Red Oak *Quercus rubra* plus some ash, alder and sycamore. Ferns, Bracken and Bramble dominated the ground flora, but there were plentiful bluebells, now setting seed, along with Foxglove, Red Campion and Climbing Corydalis. A wetter area, normally a spring, had Lesser Spearwort and Yellow Pimpernel in flower. A red kite's nest was spotted with the parent birds flying around.

Our final destination was a pond, developed from a natural spring. A few introduced Bulrush *Typha latifolia* had become almost a monoculture, but also noted were Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*, Sharp-flowered *Juncus acutiflorus* and Bulbous Rush *J. bulbosus*. We were now near the farm and a welcome glass of cold orange juice awaited us. We gave a huge thank you to Rob and Emma for inviting us to view their farm and looking after us so well. We trust our survey (126 species) will be useful and wish them well with their rewilding plans.

### Weybecks Pasture Survey, near Kilnsey Crag, 13 July

Leader: Bruce Brown

We last visited this single field YWT reserve noted for its orchids in 2017, 6 years ago now. Some deterioration in the site's quality has been noted by the YWT area manager, Graham Stranding, so a new tenant, Neil Heseltine, has now been appointed who intends to bring in his Belted Galloway cattle to graze through autumn 2023 and winter, and hopefully soon improve the overall diversity of the site. So, we volunteered to carry out a baseline plant survey.

Nine members met at the large parking layby next to Skirfare Barn and near the Arncliffe road junction. In the verge opposite were some magnificent specimens of Giant Bellflower in full flower. We walked along the Arncliffe road for a few hundred yards, enjoying the aniseed aroma of Sweet Cicely and noting some plants of Melancholy Thistle along the way to the Reserve entrance just beyond a gushing spring stream. The top part of the Reserve has been managed as a haymeadow, typically neutral grassland, but with limited herbaceous species present, and one area hoping to be improved with winter grazing. On our visit the vegetation was quite tall with no official stock in the field. However, a few rogue sheep had managed to

find their way in, despite the best efforts of volunteers carrying out some repairs to the old crumbly walls.

Nine different grass species were recorded as we worked our way anticlockwise from the gate towards the spring stream which runs down the eastern edge of the site. In full flow after recent rain, it had to be paddled to get to plants on the far side. The turf alongside the stream is much shorter with limestone outcrops, definitely calcareous in nature with typical lime-loving species such as Blue Moor-grass, Thyme *Thymus drucei* and Salad Burnet. Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Marsh-marigold lined the stream bank, and a nice colony of the uncommon Flat-sedge, about 20-30 flower spikes, was re-found at exactly the same grid ref as seen in 2017. We continued down the stream side noting Great Burnet, Burnet-saxifrage, Lesser Scabious, and on a bank adorned with flowering Rock-rose we stopped for lunch in pleasant sunshine.

This part of the reserve is normally notable for a number of marsh-orchid species, and a month earlier whilst on a walling work party BNB found Common Spotted, Northern Marsh and Early Marsh-orchid plus a couple of hybrids. But all had gone on this July visit, just one or two dead heads left, due no doubt to the hot and dry early summer weather. Recent rain had however brought on a couple of Fragrant Orchids, still not fully open. The exact status of Fragrants in this area of the Dales is difficult to assess because of conflicting characters so on the advice of NB we decided to record as *Gymnadenia conopsea* agg.

Heading west above the tree-lined boundary and River Skirfare, the north facing slopes become wetter with calcareous flushes and shorter turf, ideal conditions for Marsh Helleborine which is the star species of the reserve. Just a few were in flower, but many more as leafy rosettes were still waiting to throw up a flowering stem. The earlier summer drought must have suppressed their normal growth. Similarly large numbers of Devil's-bit Scabious leaf rosettes showed what was yet to come, although this is a naturally later flowering species. Black Bogrush was doing well, along with Creeping Willow *Salix repens* and Butterwort. Old heads betrayed the presence of the farinaceous leaves of Bird's-eye Primrose and a few spikes of Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* were in bud.

On a June work party the wall repairers had spotted a clump of Herb Paris by the wall under the ash trees, just outside the official reserve, but gone over now in July. We moved to the northwest corner where the tall vegetation was now head-high with Meadowsweet, Lesser Pond-sedge and Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. After a little searching we also found Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Long-bracted Yellow-sedge *Carex lepidocarpa*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana*, Angelica and Marsh Horsetail. There was little else to add as we made our way back in the warm afternoon sun, tempting some of us to call in at the Kilnsey Park cafe on the way home. 111 species had been

recorded in 2023 compared with 128 in 2017, so species variety and possibly also abundance has decreased somewhat. The weather pattern of 2023 could be responsible for much of this, but even so, it will be interesting to see how the site develops after a few years of cattle grazing.



Marsh Helleborine

### Bolton Abbey Estate, Mucky Park survey, 11-18 September

Leader: Bruce Brown

Mucky Park is a 77-acre area of contained moorland adjacent to Barden Moor, lying on the west side of the Burnsall road just beyond Barden Tower. WNS botany members were invited to carry out a botanical survey of Mucky Park and the adjacent fields of Low House Farm. The Park was surveyed over three days in September but it was too late in the season to carry out the field surveys, so these are intended to be completed in 2024. The Park land has been subjected to sheep grazing over many years, and much of it has degraded into tussocky



Mucky Park. Credit: Bruce Brown

Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* grassland, rushy areas and extensive bracken patches. The Estate would like to improve its conservation value and have recently been limiting sheep grazing intensity. As a result, some regeneration of the heathland shrubs is starting to occur.

Our survey noted the general habitats of grassland, heath, bog, trackside, waterside, etc. and the species present were recorded. Some species were single habitat specific and others more widespread. Abundance was assessed on the DAFOR scale and photos taken. The central to northern parts were fed by small springs and runnels around which healthy looking blanket bog had developed, and a pole was used to

measure underlying peat depths of 60-120cm. The wetter parts had areas of sphagnum mosses and more extensive cotton-grasses, both active peat formers. Vegetation cover was complete, so no peat erosion was occurring. Notable bog plants included Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Violet *Viola palustris*, Marsh Willowherb, Fen Bedstraw, Bog Asphodel and Narrow-leaved Buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*. Wetland plants in the runnels were Blinks, Lesser Spearwort and the Water Starwort *Callitriche stagnalis*.

Surrounding the blanket bog, the other notable habitat was heathland, merging from wet to dry heath as the peat depth decreased towards more mineral-rich soil and underlying rock closer to the surface. Despite the preponderance of *Molinia*, *Nardus* and Heath Rush *Juncus squarrosus*, many small patches of heather, bilberry and cowberry were beginning to re-appear, and parts of the park are now looking encouragingly healthy. Associated species included Tormential, Heath Bedstraw and woodrushes, and less sheep grazing will encourage grasses such as Fescues, Bents and Sweet vernal-grass to develop. Reduction of bracken dominance in some of the heath areas would equally be beneficial. The Estate were encouraged by our survey results and plan to introduce cattle grazing, and hopefully experiment with 'no fence' collars, so that the areas grazed can be more closely controlled.

## Crab Apple Tree Survey, May, June and September

**Bruce Brown**

Last year BNB studied 4 crab apple trees for the national 'Orchard Network Crab Apple Project' (ONCA) as reported in the 2022 WNS Review. Two of these trees were selected this year for DNA analysis, a roadside tree on Bingley Road, Menston and the large old tree in Sun Lane Nature Reserve, Burley. 12 leaves from each were collected in June and sent off to the laboratory in Cambridge doing the DNA work. At the time of writing these notes, the results are still awaited.

On request to continue the project, 5 new trees were chosen this year. Tree 5 was in a field close to Kex Beck, passed on our 4 May botany meeting. Tree 6 was on the lane-side at Wydra near Swinsty Reservoir, and Tree 7 a couple of miles south by Hambleton House Farm on Norwood Edge. Trees 8 and 9 were in a field hedgerow on a footpath just north of Weeton. The lanes and roadsides around Weeton, Huby and North Ripton seemed to be popular for crab apple trees. It would have been nice to have included trees higher up Wharfedale, but none came to mind.

2022 was an abundant year for both flowering and fruiting, but less so in 2023. Maybe some trees were taking a 'rest year' or the weather patterns were contrary for good growth, but the spring survey on 14-17 May showed variable results. Trees 5, 6 and 7 had fairly sparse but sufficient flowers for the survey, whilst the Weeton trees 8/9 were more prolific. There was concern that the autumn apple crop would be equally affected. A check on 11 September showed there to be very limited numbers of apples on Trees 5 and 6, so it was decided to survey and collect the fruit early, rather than risk losing them in the undergrowth if they fell. Tree 7 had no apples at all so was abandoned. Fortunately, Trees 8/9 had a decent crop so were surveyed on 23 September as the apples were starting to drop.

The apples on Trees 5 and 6 were small, fairly green and with virtually glabrous leaves, so typical of what we know as a crab apple. Trees 8 and 9 had slightly larger apples, 8 was somewhat yellower and 9 more strongly red tinged and leaves showed patchy down or hairs, suggesting it more likely that there was some hybridisation in their make-up. Interestingly they occurred in a hedgerow containing 5 crab apple trees, one of the other trees having a good crop and the other two virtually no apples at all. So, it clearly cannot be assumed that several trees growing close together are necessarily of similar origin. It will be interesting to see what the outcomes and conclusions will be as the ONCA project reaches its final year.

Where there have been large numbers of reports for a particular species it has not been possible to acknowledge records individually. My apologies if any names have been missed out.

For the coming year Rachel Huxham is taking over as Mammals recorder while I will carry on as recorder for Amphibians and Reptiles.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to everyone providing records, attending meetings, taking part in surveys, or helping with information and plant identification. The following initials and abbreviations have been used in the text.

<b>ARG</b>	Anthony & Rita Grainger
<b>ATI</b>	Ancient Tree Inventory
<b>BAE</b>	Bolton Abbey Estate
<b>BAT</b>	Jesse Tregale
<b>BB</b>	Brian Burrow
<b>BBG</b>	Bradford Botany Group
<b>BNB</b>	Bruce Brown
<b>BSBI</b>	Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland
<b>CH</b>	Carmen Horner
<b>DAB</b>	David Broughton VC64 BSBI Recorder
<b>DL</b>	David Leather
<b>DT</b>	David Tennant
<b>HDNS</b>	Harrogate & District Naturalists Society
<b>HMB</b>	Heather Burrow
<b>IB</b>	Ian Brand
<b>JP</b>	Jo Peters
<b>LJW</b>	Laurie & Janine Wildwood
<b>LS</b>	Laurence Sutton
<b>MANT</b>	Menston Area Nature Trust
<b>MJC</b>	Mike & Joyce Clerk
<b>ML</b>	Midge Leather
<b>NB</b>	Neil Barrett
<b>NDF</b>	Nyree & David Fearnley
<b>NV</b>	Nicky Vernon
<b>ONCA</b>	Orchard Network Crab Apple Project
<b>SP</b>	Steve Parkes
<b>SS</b>	Sue Stevens
<b>SSi</b>	Susan Simcock
<b>SW</b>	Sarah Ward
<b>YPP</b>	Yorkshire Peat Partnership

## Mammal, Amphibian and Reptile records

Many thanks to all those who have passed on records, in whatever form, during the past five years whilst I have acted as Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles recorder. It has been a pleasure to hear of the wealth of wildlife still present within Wharfedale, especially as I have never seen some of the species myself!

## This year's contributors were:

David Alred (**DA**), Mike & Joyce Clerk (**M&JC**), Ian Condliffe (**IC**), David & Nyree Fearnley (**D&NF**), Kelly Harmar (**KH**), Gordon Haycock (**GH**), Rachel Huxham (**RH**), Andy Jowett (**AJ**), Alan Moore (**AM**), David O'Connor (**DO**), Denis & Margaret O'Connor (**D&MOC**), Steve Parkes (**SP**), Ruth Paynter (**RP**), Paul Purvis (**PP**), Peter & Anne Riley (**P&AR**), Karen Shackleton (**KS**), Kelvin Smith (**KS<sub>m</sub>**), Bruce Speed (**BS**), Sue Stanwell (**SS**), John Stidworthy (**JS**), Isobel & James Tate-Smith (**I&JTS**), Phil Tennyson (**PT**), Helen Thomas (**HT**), Bill Thorne (**BT**), David Varney (**DV**), Jenny & Alastair, Watson (**J&AW**), Steve Westerman (**SW**), Rowan Worsman (**RW**).



# Mammals

Denis O Connor

## Insectivores

### Common hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

The mammal recording year got off to a good start with a hedgehog recorded on 1 January by a trail camera in an Otley garden, despite the temperature being below 4C, attracted by scattered sunflower seeds. Traditionally hedgehogs were thought to hibernate but they will venture out at times, more frequently seen as winters become warmer.

For the first time in five years, records of live hedgehogs (21) exceeded the number killed on the roads (16) so perhaps there is room for cautious optimism. Perhaps the lowering of speed limits in our towns is proving a positive benefit?

Twenty-one of the records were from around Otley, nine from Ilkley, two from Burley-in-Wharfedale, one from near Strid Wood and only two from further up the dale, in Hebden. Two observers from Ben Rhydding said the hedgehogs in their gardens were the first seen for many years (BT and DV).

One Otley garden had visits from at least three different animals in one night, again picked up by a trail camera, an excellent way to record nocturnal activity. Another Otley garden was visited by a mother and baby (SS).

In two cases, young hedgehogs were seen out during the day and taken to refuge centres, as they were possibly in trouble. Another heartening story of hedgehog rescue came from a neighbour of Paul Purvis who, on 26 November discovered three young, undernourished hedgehogs in his garden and took them to the Otley Rescue Centre where two survived. One was returned into another neighbour's garden in a box while the other had already gone into hibernation so hopefully can be released later.

British hedgehogs are now categorised as vulnerable to extinction, with a place on the Red List of Threatened Species (International Union for Conservation of Nature) since 2020. Their population has fallen from an estimated 30 million in the 1950s to just half a million in 2018 (Mammal Society figures). Apart from road deaths, they have also been severely affected by habitat loss and the use of chemicals in farming and gardens. It is far better to encourage hedgehogs to eat your garden slugs and snails than to use slug pellets which will kill both pests and hedgehogs!

### Mole *Talpa europaea*

From the obvious presence of molehills throughout Wharfedale moles would appear to be flourishing. However, appearances may be deceptive as the earthworm population has fallen by at least a third in the past 25 years due to an increase in the use of inorganic fertilisers, pesticides and animal-worming chemicals which accumulate in the soil. Earthworms are a crucial factor in soil health and the continuing function of our ecosystem. They are also the main food source for moles.

### Common and Pygmy Shrews *Sorex araneus* and *Sorex minutus*

There were no records this year despite common shrews being the second most common British mammal, with an estimated population of over 40 million. They have a very high metabolic rate and need to eat every few hours so are constantly active. However, as their main food consists of insects, earthworms, slugs and snails, they are unlikely to be seen foraging beneath bird feeders and tend to remain undetected.

### Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*

In July, John Stidworthy reported that he was pretty sure he had seen a water shrew rustling about in dead leaves in Panorama Woods in Ilkley, judging from its size, shape and colour, although he never got to see the whole animal. He noted it was nowhere near suitable water but that he used to see them in similar places in the Chilterns.

According to the Mammal Society, water shrews are semi-aquatic and most often found in habitats close to water. Occasionally they are found far from water in woodlands, grasslands, scrub and hedgerows, usually as young are dispersing.

This is the tenth record for our area since 2008 with most of the others seen in streams and ponds but in fact, Black Beck, flowing down from Ilkley Moor, runs almost alongside Panorama Woods and the shrew could well have originated there.

## Bats

Bat identification largely relies on a bat detector that converts their high frequency calls to ones we can hear. A peak frequency can often be picked out. Other factors aiding identification are size, time of emergence after sunset, flight pattern and height.

UK bat populations crashed in the last century due to human activity. Key factors were loss of roosting sites, decline in insect populations, pesticide use, persecution and poor water quality. At least three species are thought to be edging towards recovery including Common pipistrelle and Natterer's, while six other species more appear stable.

### Common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Recorded from three different sites around Otley, Burley-in-Wharfedale, Lindley Bridge and Leathley, especially around the church.

### Brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*

Common but difficult to pick up because of their quiet calls. Reported from Lindley Bridge and Wharfemeadows Park in Otley.

### Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*

Only reported from Riverside Park in Otley backing on to Farnley Hall Woods with numbers doing circuits over garden ponds.

### Noctule bat *Nyctylua noctula*

The largest Yorkshire bat often detected and seen flying over quite high, just after sunset. Reported passing over Leathley, Riverside Park and hunting around Otley Bridge.

### Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*

Recorded emerging from and hunting around Otley Bridge, Lindley Bridge and other bridges along the Washburn. They can often be picked up in torchlight skimming low over the water.

## Rabbits and Hares

### European rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Recorded throughout Wharfedale and whilst so familiar as to be under-recorded, it does appear that many previously flourishing rabbit warrens are now deserted. Numbers have certainly fallen over recent years due to myxomatosis and viral haemorrhagic disease.

They are less evident round Riverside Park in Otley in winter with the first young seen from March onwards. Emerging from Farnley Hall Woods in spring they then appear to largely desert the woods and live around gardens in small numbers, perhaps with burrows in the more impenetrable shrubberies. They never reach plague proportions, and it could be that

their low population density makes them less susceptible to disease.

The biggest number reported was of at least twenty at Maple Grange between Otley and Burley with at least one black individual (PP).

### **Brown hare**

#### **Lepus capensis**

Hares continue to be reported from throughout Wharfedale with fifty-six records received. The largest number of records was from around Otley with twenty, half of which were from the Washburn Valley. Others came from Ilkley, Denton, Timble, Denton and Rocking Moors, Arncliffe, Grimwith Reservoir, Blubberhouses, Grassington and Hawskwick.

The biggest numbers were six at Timble Ings on 4 April and seven at Primrose Hill, Ilkley, on 14 May (D&NF).

Several observers did not submit numbers but commented that hares were plentiful around the Denton Estate, around Beckermonds and Nethergill.

Although they are still widely reported, their numbers fell by 80% in the last century and there have recently been worrying reports of rabbit diseases jumping species to hares.

## **Rodents**

### **Grey squirrel**

#### **Sciurus carolinensis**

Ubiquitous in most woodland and many garden habitats throughout the south of Wharfedale, so numerous as to be under-reported. They have considerable nuisance value but are worth watching for their problem-solving abilities around bird feeders. Along with jays, they are responsible for the spread of oak trees through their burying of acorns which are not always retrieved.

They carry a viral disease, squirrelpox, to which they are immune but which they easily transmit to red squirrels with deadly results. For this reason, a 5km exclusion zone is operated around the red squirrel reserve in Langstrothdale.

### **Red squirrel**

#### **Sciurus vulgaris**

The only surviving population of red squirrels in our area is in the Greenfield Red Squirrel Reserve in the far north of Langstrothdale. They can at times be seen outside the reserve. At Nethergill Farm, outside Oughtershaw, up to four have been recorded this year on cameras placed in the woods on the opposite side of Oughtershaw Beck, one of the sources of the Wharfe. These occasionally also visit feeders at the farm (HT).

There was a rumour that they had recently been seen in woods above Barden Bridge and Rachel Huxham led a Yorkshire Mammal Group walk to look for signs of them. It produced no positive results, hardly surprising as any red

squirrel venturing south from Greenfield would inevitably encounter greys with predictably tragic results.

This was almost certainly the fate of six red squirrels seen singly between Kettlewell and Ilkley in 2020. These had possibly been escapes from the captive breeding programme at Kilnsey Country Park or perhaps young forced out of Greenfield by a bumper breeding season. One recorded in a garden at Norwood Edge in 2021, possibly a survivor from that expansion, was also not reported again.

Grey squirrels will often have traces of red brown among the grey of their fur, leading to incorrect identification. Photos of such animals have appeared in the local press occasionally.

### **Wood mouse**

#### **Apodemus sylvaticus**

Also called Field Mouse or Long-tailed Field Mouse.

The UK's most common mouse but mainly nocturnal so not often seen. The first was picked up on a trail camera in an Otley Garden on 1 January, lured out by scattered sunflower seeds which it took away for later consumption.

On 20 March, the same camera recorded an adult and half-sized juvenile feeding on seeds left by two hedgehogs. At one point the two mice cuddled up together until the adult dashed off, followed by the young one.

Other records were one in Burley-in-Wharfedale and several from Strid Wood of mice out in daylight picking up food left for the birds at one of the shelters.

### **House Mouse**

#### **Mus musculus**

No records this year. A mouse inside a building is not always a house mouse as wood mice (bigger ears and eyes and fawn rather than grey) will come inside at times.

### **Field Vole**

#### **Microtus agrestis**

Britain's most common small mammal with a population thought to be about 75 million. They are seldom seen and difficult to distinguish from a bank vole. Field voles have greyer upper parts and a shorter tail. They are more likely to occur in grassland and moorland where we may not see them, but they are certainly visible to hunting barn owls, short-eared owls and kestrels.

### **Bank Vole**

#### **Clethrionomys glareolus**

Also known as Red-backed vole and more reddish-brown on the back and nape with a longer tail than the field vole.

On 28 April, one was seen popping in and out of holes in the ground near the bird feeders at Otley Wetlands Nature Reserve (OWNR). Another was seen in June in an Otley Garden. A third record also came from OWRN on 1 September. One under a corrugated sheet at

OWNR could have been either a bank or a field vole.

The two most common small mammals in urban gardens are probably wood mice and bank voles with both suffering greatly from predation by cats.

### **Water vole**

#### **Arvicola amphibious**

Once common along the Wharfe and its feeder streams but has pretty much wiped out by escaped or released American mink in the late 1980s.

In 2020, Yorkshire Water introduced two batches, each of one hundred voles, into two areas of Timble Ings, having previously verified that mink were absent.

Although nobody has reported seeing them, Phil Tennyson of Yorkshire Water, who oversees the programme, says they have been recorded on trail cameras and that there are plenty of signs of them detected around the woodland. It is thought that they have spread up to 1km from where they were released. He is awaiting the results of an ecological survey commissioned by Yorkshire Water.

Only one mink has been seen in the woods since the release of the voles and that was back in September 2020. Apparently genetic material from small mammals can be carried downstream in water courses and could conceivably attract mink normally found around the Wharfe Valley reservoirs.

### **Brown Rat**

#### **Rattus norvegicus**

Although the subject of horror stories in the popular press, unless you live on a farm, your nearest rat is likely to be no closer than 50 yards away and unlikely to be seen in your garden unless scraps of food put out for the birds are left lying around.

There have been reports of rats seen during the day in Otley Memorial Gardens where food remains are sometimes left by people eating sandwiches on the benches.

There were no other records of live rats with just three dead ones, two killed on the roads in Otley, and near Addingham. Another was dead on a footpath across farmland east of Otley.

## **Foxes**

### **Fox**

#### **Vulpes vulpes**

There were a number of sightings of live foxes from gardens in the Otley area (AJ, MOC) while there was a report of one having a stand-off with a cat on East Busk Lane, Otley, at 2am.

Ruth Paynter, who has a nose for foxes, picked up the scent of one in Weston Woods and Andy Jowett saw a group of cubs in the Washburn Valley.



Much further up Wharfedale, GH saw one at Arncliffe, west of Kettlewell, which possibly had an earth in a limestone pavement.

One fox was found dead on a path across farmland east of Otley with no cause of death obvious (PP). Another was dead on the Otley bypass (RH).

## Mustelids

### Stoat *Mustela erminea*

A stoat in half-ermine was reported at the western edge of Otley on 1 February. The change to white is triggered by decreasing day length but is uncommon in our area now with so little snow.

The stoat highlight was a family 'caravan' of seven individuals which crossed Greenmires Lane near Stainburn in front of PP's bike on 27 May. Stoats are solitary for most of the year, only coming together to breed. The young are born in spring and the mother will look after them until they are self-sufficient and able to hunt for themselves at about three months.

JS recorded two stoats around Ilkley in September and October, one crossing Old Keighley Road and the other crossing the path up to White Wells. Stoats were also recorded on trail cameras set up by AJ on the Denton Estate. Another was at Nethergill Farm in Langstrothdale in December (HT).

### Weasel *Mustela nivalis*

Weasels are typically reported less often than stoats, perhaps because being smaller they tend to hunt more within burrows and spaces within stone walls rather than in the open. They are often seen only briefly streaking across roads and paths.

There were five records, all from lower Wharfedale. Two were reported by Peter and Anne Riley, the first at Otley gravel pits on 27 January, the second from the Washburn Valley, near Dob Bridge, on 12 October. Also on 27 January one was on the road between Blubberhouses and Greenhow (PR). One was near Ilkley Tarn on 14 March (KS) with another seen at the edge of Ilkley shooting across a lane (JS).

### American Mink *Mustela vison*

Mink have been recorded in Wharfedale since 1988, with their numbers in England peaking at about 110,000 in the 1980s. More recently, numbers are thought to have fallen to as few as 40,000, perhaps being displaced by the resurgent number of otters on English rivers.

However, on the Wharfe around Ilkley, where there are a number of otters, mink are still present. Whilst usually seen singly SW thinks that he may have seen up to 4 different animals

due to their markings and the distances between sightings.

One was recorded on the river bank at Denton (RH) while they were also recorded on trail cameras on the Denton Estate near Ilkley (AJ).

In the Washburn Valley, PT of Yorkshire Water is of the opinion that mink mainly spend their time around the reservoirs feeding on rainbow trout.

### Polecat/ Polecat-ferret *Mustela putorius*

An intriguing report from Ian Condliffe described a mammal seen briefly near Higher Heights Hole, near Malham Moor, on 8 September. It was a mustelid about two feet long or a bit more so bigger than a mink, dark grey-black with coarse grey fur. Unfortunately he did not see the face, but the description would fit a polecat or polecat-ferret.

There is a population of polecats in Cumbria and in recent years in our area, polecats or polecat-ferrets have been recorded six times – four dead on the roads at Grassington, Beamsley and twice near Chelker Reservoir with live animals at Leathley and at Nethergill Farm in Langstrothdale.

### Otter *Lutra lutra*

Otters were recorded frequently on the Wharfe between Ilkley Old Bridge and Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits with most of the records in the first six months of the year.

Steve Westerman, who watches this stretch of river intensively and has written a number of well researched and observed articles on the otters in his Nature Notes column, thinks there have been two females along this stretch: a mother with two cubs downstream and a mother with one cub upstream from Beanlands Island. By now the cubs will be fully grown.

Near Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits, a female with three cubs was reported in late January with a separate adult nearby. The latter was thought to be a dog otter seen regularly at BRGP towards the end of 2022/ start of 2023 (SP). In mid-March Karen Shackleton saw two cubs, apparently on their own in the river beside Ilkley playpark. RH and DV also reported otters along this stretch of river on a number of occasions.

Away from the river in Ilkley, a neighbour of JS lost most of the fish from his pond and picked up the culprit on his security camera – an otter! They live a mile from the river but the otter could well have wandered up Black Beck which runs along that edge of the town.

Upstream from Ilkley, the furthest upstream record was of spraint beside the river at Barden Bridge (RM).

Downstream from Ilkley, around Otley they were seen on at least five occasions between Otley weir and the White Bridge with footprints

in the sand at the water's edge as far down as Knotford Nook. Just back from the river, otter spraint was recorded three times at OWNR.

The versatility of otters is illustrated by reports from PT of Yorkshire Water of sightings of otters in the woodland at Timble Ings. In the spring, when the toads and frogs are spawning, they have been recorded all the way up the catchment on the woodland fringe, apparently feeding on spawn. They could equally well have been feeding on the tadpoles as well as on the frogs and toads themselves. Tadpoles can represent a significant part of an otter's diet. They will certainly eat small frogs and have been recorded eating adult frogs and toads, removing the skin to avoid the toxins in the toads' glands which would usually render them unpalatable.

A dead otter was recovered from Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits on 17 March, believed to have been hit by a car the previous night. It was measured by Steve Parkes at 1.4 metres long and weighed 6.6kg. It was hoped to get it sent to the Cardiff University Otter Project for analysis.

Two other dead otters were reported, one from Old Pool Road on 21 September, the other on Otley Chevin on 12 October, a mile south of the river. It could perhaps have been a young animal leaving the Wharfe to search for a territory of its own.

The survival of otters on the Wharfe ultimately depends on the health of the river, under threat from sewage and agricultural discharges. A pertinent comment came from RP's husband Tom, a lifelong angler, who said that there are no longer the number or variety of fish in the Wharfe at Otley that there used to be. Older anglers remembered large catches of coarse fish, but now if you catch anything you are doing well.

### Badger *Meles meles*

In lower Wharfedale, at least four badger setts were visited by AJ with two badgers seen at one sett, four at another and two other setts described as very active.

At another sett, visited several times, there were several adults and three well-grown cubs on 25 May (DOC). Another young badger was noticed a trail camera on 2 September on the edge of Ilkley Moor.

Dead badgers were found on roads near Otley, near Hubby, at Burley-in-Wharfedale and near Bolton Bridge.

The national badger cull has been going on for ten years so far. It has killed 200,000 badgers out of a total population of 500,000. It has not yet arrived in Yorkshire. A study of the effect of the cull on tuberculosis in cattle, commissioned by the government, ran from 1998 to 2006 and concluded that 'badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle tuberculosis control in Britain.' Two parliamentary debates

to stop the cull, in 2012 and 2014, were passed with very large majorities. Both were ignored by the government and the cull is scheduled to continue until at least 2025.

# Deer

## Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Wharfedale's most common large mammal with fifty-eight records of between one and five animals.

The most sightings were from the Otley area with eleven at OWNR, eleven from Farnley Hall Woods, nine from the Washburn, four from around Leathley and three from Otley Chevin. Some of these, particularly those from OWNR and Farnley Hall Woods are likely to have been of the same animals seen a number of times.

There were four records from Ilkley as well as "loads" seen on the Denton Estate with no numbers quoted. The other records were scattered around Wharfedale, including near Blubberhouses, Linton Falls and Starbotton. The largest group was of five seen on Otley Chevin on 28 March.

There were six reports of a doe with one or two fawns including a very early one with two fawns at Grass Wood on 4 January. The others were in July and August, of a doe with a tiny fawn at Heber's Ghyll, Ilkley, one with two bigger young near Panorama Wood, Ilkley, one with a noticeably young fawn still with spots above Linton Falls, one with two well-grown young at Leathley and one with a single fawn at Blubberhouses. Two large young were at OWNR without the adult being seen.

## Red Deer *Cervus elephus*

Groups of up to sixteen red deer were seen in the fields below Denton Hall near Ilkley. They varied in colour from cream through to very dark and were presumably escapees from the farmed herd kept there. The Hall has ambitious plans for rewilding and hope to establish a deer park.

One seen dead beside the A59 west of Blubberhouses on 25 May (M&JC) could well also have been an escape from the herd. The spot is about four miles north of Denton Hall across moorland.

There were no reports of other deer species.





1 **Otter**

Credit: Rich Bunce

2 **Otters**

Credit: Rich Bunce

3 **Brown Hare**

Credit: Rich Bunce

4 **Stoat**

Credit: Rich Bunce

5 **Roe Deer**

Credit: Denis O'Connor

6 **Roe Deer and Fawn**

Credit: Kelvin Smith

7 **Otter**

Credit: Kelvin Smith

8 **Brown Hare**

Credit: Kelvin Smith





# Reptiles

Denis O'Connor

## Lizards

### Common lizard

#### *Zootica vivipara*

The UK's most common reptile and widespread in our area in moorland and woodland edges. The common lizard is fast-moving and quick to vanish into the bracken and heather.

Most of the records came from the Washburn Valley, just below Thruscross Reservoir with one on 3 April, two on 15 April, two on 23 June and one just a few days old on 7 August, followed by five more first years on 29 August. Their young are born live, normally between late June and August. Another adult was found beside Thruscross Reservoir on 27 March and one at Timble Ings on 11 April (all records from DA).

One was seen above Thruscross on 4 April (AM) and one on Ilkley Moor on 10 May (D&NF).

### Slow worm

#### *Anguis fragilis*

This year there were eighteen records of these snake-like legless lizards, with a total of thirty animals. Slow worms can occur in a wide range of habitats including steep slopes, woodland glades, pastures, heaths, parks and gardens. They can be difficult to find because they spend most of their time among the roots of vegetation and in loose soil. Whilst they will occasionally bask in direct sunlight, they are more easily found beneath sheets of metal or roofing felt warmed by the sun. Sometimes these items are put down to attract slow worms.

Most records came from the Washburn Valley, around its two reservoirs. At Thruscross, slow worms were found in the area between the dam wall and Low Dam, on the southwest slopes of the reservoir, and above the reservoir where the Washburn enters. Some of these were below metal sheets and squares of roofing felt, including one six-inch youngster. Other individuals were more in the open, often partially hidden and almost invisible among bracken stems. In August, two were basking in the full sun (DA, AM, DOC).

Around Lindley Wood Reservoir, slow worms were observed below metal squares at both the slipway and the bridge ends. Five were discovered below the same square (AM). One was found on the track beside the reservoir (KH).

Further downstream, at Lindley Bridge Trout Farm, the owner told AM that in 2022 he had inadvertently destroyed a slow worm hibernation site by demolishing an old stone wall. It had contained at least twenty slow worms.

Further north in Wharfedale, one slow worm was observed in August in Cross Wood, Starbotton, and a very late record of one at Grass Wood on the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary walk (D&NF).

## Snakes

### Adder

#### *Vipera berus*

There has been a very encouraging increase in adder sightings in our area over the last two years. During 2023 there were sightings on twenty-one days, with between four and twelve adders on nine of these days. This compares to sightings in 2022 on seventeen days with never more than three on any one day. Smaller numbers were recorded in previous years. This increase is partly attributable to an increase in observer participation, encouraged by the Adder Survey (run by Nidderdale National Landscape, previously Nidderdale AONB), which includes part of the Wharfedale Naturalists Society recording area.

In the upper Washburn valley, it seems clear there is a continuous distribution of adders from a known hibernation site near Thruscross Reservoir, extending north-west along the moors above the conifer plantation. This area continues along the Washburn Valley above Thruscross and into Harden Gill with a few outliers further out on the moors, but still within the Washburn catchment area.

The earliest report of adders was of one near Stump Cross on 18 March (RW). After that there were five other records in March of between one and twelve adders. The twelve adders were spotted on 27 March, spread along an area of only one-third of a mile between a known hibernation site near Thruscross and a possible second hibernation site. All these adders looked dark and were likely mainly males which had yet to shed their skins after recently emerging from hibernation. Conditions on that day were almost perfect with 80% sun and very little wind. The same area had been surveyed the previous year with no adders found, emphasising

the role of the weather in finding these elusive animals.

In April there were five records in the same area including nine adders on 16 April, seven on 19 April and four on 20 April, which included a male coiled on top of a female, later entwined with a competing male. There were also sightings of single animals at two points above Thruscross as well as another on the moor above Timble Ings.

In May there were sightings on five dates with seven in the same Thruscross area on 2 May with two males now fighting over a female. By the 9 May, action was hotting up with two males and two females intertwined, one of these pairs mating. In addition, there were sightings of five other adders spread over three spots above Thruscross.

Sightings inevitably dropped off during the summer with growth of the bracken and the increase in mobility of the now warmed-up snakes, but four were seen on 8 June, then five on 11 August. The final sightings above Thruscross in early September included a small adder of perhaps a year old and two adders even smaller, likely only a few days old.

Seven sloughed skins were found during the year, mainly from adults but with one only 18cm long probably from a one-year-old (records from DA, AM, DO, DOC).

Whilst adder numbers have decreased over the last 30 years, the upper Washburn, surrounding moorland and at least two other areas within the Nidderdale National Landscape Area make these parts of North Yorkshire a stronghold for adders. In many English counties adders are now extinct, which makes our surviving populations even more important.

Their national decline is attributable to several factors. Climate heating affects adders ability to hibernate during our warmer winters, habitat destruction causes population fragmentation, and this reduces genetic mixing. Heather burning on the grouse moors must inevitably be a problem. Adders are known to be attacked by pheasants and large numbers of pheasants are released each year in parts of Wharfedale.



1 Slow Worm

2 Juvenile Slow Worm with pen for size

3 Three Adders coiled together

Credit: Denis O'Connor





# Amphibians

Denis O'Connor

## Newts

### Great crested newt

#### *Triturus cristatus*

Although they have been known at sites in both West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire for some years, none were reported from Wharfedale until after Gordon Haycock introduced eggs to the ponds at the Nell Bank Centre in Ilkley, starting in 2009. They are now doing well there and a survey by GH on 23 March recorded forty-five males and fifteen females distributed between the four ponds.

Since 2020, they have been established at Gallows Hill Nature Reserve in Otley, with nine males, nine females, two juveniles and many eggs present on 24 March and eleven males, and thirteen females counted on 27 April.

### Palmate newt

#### *Lissotriton helveticus*

On 1 January, ponds in one Riverside Park garden contained eight free-swimming palmate newts. On 17 January, after the temperature had dropped so sharply and quickly that the water froze into ice that was as clear as glass, the newts were still active below the ice. Their number had increased to at least fifty by 21 January.

As in previous years, after five clumps of frogspawn had been deposited in the final weeks of March, the newts attacked the frogspawn. All the eggs were eaten, leaving just the jelly.

During his Nell Bank survey on 23 March, GH recorded forty-nine males and fifty-two males spread over all four ponds. At Gallows Hill there were five males and two females in one of the ponds, while on 27 April fourteen were counted.

At Freshfield Quarry where Kelvin Smith has regularly found palmates under stones in flooded wheel tracks, he counted twenty individuals under a stone no more than a foot square.

### Smooth or Common newt

#### *Lissotriton vulgaris*

Nothing like as common in Wharfedale as the name would suggest. At Gallows Hill on 24 March there was just a single male while none we recorded at Nell Bank on 23 March.

At a garden pond in Burley-in-Wharfedale they were reported to be present but greatly outnumbered by alpine newts (P&AR).

### Alpine Newt

#### *Ichthyosaura alpestris*

An introduced species which seems to coexist without problems alongside our native newt species.

At Nell Bank on 23 March they were present in all four ponds with a total of thirty-six males and twenty-three females. At Gallows Hill on 24 March there were four males and six females with three males and five females on 27 April.

## Frogs and Toads

### Common toad

#### *Bufo bufo*

In the third week of March, Jenny Watson was asked to help with a recently discovered toad crossing on East Busk Lane at the edge of Otley. This annual movement of toads has been known about for some years by locals living at Brick House Farm. They said that at times there could be thousands and could cover the road surface. A number of volunteers from Wildlife Friendly Otley also turned out to help at the crossing. Over a hundred toads were safely helped across on the night of 20 March with thirty-five squashed on the road. Across several nights over five hundred toads were helped across. The spawning site is thought to be an unnamed pond to the east of the lane.

In July 2021, a local resident wrote a letter to the local newspaper drawing attention to the site and submitting comments to Leeds City Council over the East of Otley (EoO) Development, as the pond would disappear under the EoO Relief Road. Although an Environmental Statement included references to toads and other amphibians it seems likely that the full significance of the pond as a breeding site has not been considered.

Not far away, on the other side of Pool Road, Gallows Hill has been a much better-known toad breeding site although the number of toads using it has dropped significantly in recent years. Over the same week as the East Busk Lane event, numbers at Gallows Hill peaked at about seventy, mainly males with a few mating pairs.

Toads are known to migrate large distances, up to three miles to reach their spawning sites. It could be that those at Gallows Hill have come from the big paper waste disposal site at Garnett's Mill before it was redeveloped as a housing estate.

Elsewhere, on 23 March at Nell Bank, GH counted a total of one hundred and eighty-five males, seven females and lots of spawn spread over their four ponds.

In the Washburn Valley around Low Dam, toads fared well this year with a count of over three hundred on 21 March (KSm).

In Pool, PV reported that about 9 July he found the steps leading down to the basement of his house teeming with tiny toads. He had to carry them out by the bucket-load. Similar stories were told by others in the area, which has numerous small ponds and a stream but not a larger pond of the size usually used by toads. Residents had been used to seeing occasional adult toads but nothing on this scale. Perhaps there is another undiscovered spawning site!

Over the rest of the year there were just six reports of single toads from around Otley, Farnley and the Washburn Valley.

### Common frog

#### *Rana temporaria*

At Gallows Hill in the fourth week of March there were up to forty clumps of spawn in the big pond. By then the adult frogs had departed.

In garden ponds on Riverside Park there were five clumps of spawn on 28 March. A few days later no eggs were left in the jelly, the eggs eaten by the large population of palmate newts. The number of frogs spawning in these ponds has fallen markedly over recent years as newts have taken over.

In a garden at Burley-in-Wharfedale there was 'just one dollop of frogspawn.' With a large population of alpine newts, it could be that the spawn has also been predated there.

Large numbers of tadpoles were reported from Otley Wetlands Nature Reserve on 29 May and from a pond at Danefield on Otley Chevin on 5 June, most probably frog tadpoles.

Elsewhere small numbers of frogs were reported from around Wharfedale.



### 1 Adult Palmate Newt

Credit: Denis O'Connor

### 2 Juvenile Palmate Newt

Credit: Denis O'Connor

### 3 Mating Frogs

Credit: Denis O'Connor

### 4 Mating Toads at Gallows Hill NR

Credit: David O'Connor



# Membership

## How to join

We hope you have enjoyed reading our Annual Review. If you are not member of the Wharfedale Naturalists, why not think about joining?

Everyone is warmly welcome to our sociable and friendly natural history society, with much on offer for all members. We started back in 1945 and the society remains as vibrant today as did all those years ago, with a large enthusiastic membership. Everyone has different interests and skills, but we are all passionate about wildlife, nature, our countryside, and the environment.

## Here is what to expect and the benefits of becoming a member

### Summer Programme

See 'Fifty Events That Made Our Year' (P.6)

### Winter Programme

See 'Winter Talks' (P.9)

### Weekly emailed 'Nature Notes' written by five local naturalists

Bite-size pieces of nature arriving in your inbox every Friday

### Monthly Events update

Including details of other local wildlife events.

### Conservation Work Parties at five local natural history reserves, and on the Denton Estate

Also, opportunities to get involved in citizen science projects.

**Website** with access to our archive of 78 years of Annual Reviews and records, and our back catalogue of webinars on our YouTube channel.

### Financial grants supporting local wildlife, conservation, and wildlife projects

See 'Supported Projects' (P.10)

## Membership

**Adults** £12.50   **Student** £5.00   **Under 18's** £1.00

To join visit our website at [www.wharfedale-nats.org.uk](http://www.wharfedale-nats.org.uk) or contact Ros Lilley membership secretary E: [membership.wns@gmail.com](mailto:membership.wns@gmail.com)





Wharfedale  
Naturalists



*Explore, enjoy  
and conserve  
our local wildlife*

