

Ryburgh Wildlife Group February Newsletter

We've finally shaken off the longest month of the year, the question is have we shaken off winter? Some plants seem to be in flower very early this year. I have seen Lesser Celandine, Primrose and even Daffodils all in flower. The Crocuses that the Group gave away in the autumn and we planted at home are flowering.

I did see a nice patch of Winter Heliotrope in flower recently near Kelling. Most of the textbooks and guides I referred to state that there are only male plants in the UK. Other earlier flowerers, like Butterbur and Coltsfoot will be out soon so keep your eyes peeled. One plant we expect to see at this time of the year is Snowdrops, and it seems to be a bumper year for them. I drove through the Raynhams recently at night and in my headlights it really did look like a carpet of snow on the ground.



Winter Heliotrope near Kelling, photo by Julie Bunker.

January was a bit of a museum month for us. The Tring branch of the Natural History Museum which holds the Rothchild collection, was amazing. Full of stuffed animals and birds, butterflies, moths, beetles and so on. I'm used to looking at waders through binoculars so for me, it was bit of an eye-opener to see close up quite how small and delicate many of our waders are. I followed it up with a trip to the Horniman museum in South London, which has a natural history gallery full of stuffed animals and the like. I went there because (the rather poor-quality) stuffed walrus (Wally) was going to be taken away for storage while the gallery was refurbished. It also had a Southern Elephant Seal on top of a display case. I never realised how big they were. It was huge.

As an aside the museum has a very interesting collection of musical instruments too, and several bug hotels – perhaps we should offer to build a bug hotel for the Museum of Gas and Local History in Fakenham.



Bug hotel Horniman Museum, photo by David Cooling.

The point for me was that both museums were full of children. At Tring it was a Sunday lunchtime and there were hordes of families with young children whizzing around with little activity books. The Horniman trip was on a school day and there were several school groups, again with activity books. Thankfully killing and stuffing animals for private collections is a thing of the past, but it demonstrated to me that children are clearly interested in nature. One of the committee's aspirations is to improve the Group's links to schools and children with a view that some of them will gain a passion for wildlife and the environment in the years to come.

Talking of (stuffed) birds, the bird of the month for me was Fieldfare. Wherever I was during the month they were there in large numbers. Redwing were on the other hand were almost non-existent, and as for Waxwings, nothing, although one of our members (Carole) was very lucky to have a lunchtime visit to their garden by one.

You may have seen Winterwatch on the BBC coming from Arne. It was completely coincidental that we'd picked to go to Studland for a long weekend. We had a great 15 mile walk on the day of the big storm and were very lucky to see around a dozen Spoonbill and later a solitary Sanderling battling the waves and storm. Poole Harbour currently holds the largest flocks of Spoonbills. It also is home to a White-Tailed Sea Eagle that was released on the Isle of Wight needless to say we didn't see it.

While we were in Studland we made a visit to RSPB Arne and they were busy dismantling the paraphernalia needed for outside broadcast. While we were there, I had, as Chris Packham would put it, a "trouser stroking" moment – you need to watch Winterwatch to see what I mean. It was a Bullfinch that was trying to be a Hummingbird hovering to pick off seeds from a dock plant. I have never seen such a Bullfinch do that before. Talking to one of RSPB people on site, he said, "oh yes there is a very showy Bullfinch" around.



Bullfinch at Arne, photo by Julie Bunker.

Over Christmas we played a very simple game with strong magnetism, the winner being the one who was able to place all their magnets without attracting other magnets. The loser often ended up with six or seven magnets stuck together. Did the game maker get the idea from Long-tailed Tits flocks? You can often hear Long-tailed Tits buzzing away, but you can't see them in the branches and twigs. Then, all of a sudden, the first brave bird makes a dash to a new feeding patch and then one by one, like magnets, the others in the flock follow suit.

Feedback on the AGM and the quiz has been positive. It was an enjoyable social evening, and it was lovely to see so many members and put faces to names, new and old. The committee are looking at other possible social events during the year. We would like to hear your feedback on the vision that was on the boards in the bar at the pub. I will send them separately as not everyone could make the AGM.

As for the quiz, the team I was on "woz robbed". We were smugly sitting in the winning position until the last round; local knowledge of Norfolk (I was born in Surrey so no hope for me). Name the two towns or villages in Norfolk that start with a "Y". There is a Yaxley in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, but not in Norfolk. Made worse by the fact that Yelverton had cloned itself from Devon and now also exists in Norfolk. We'd had done better if we had listened to one of our team members who knew that China was the other place in the world, besides the USA, where alligators lived. Runner up 2024, winner 2025?.

The Group continues to work in the community orchard. A memorial pear tree that had been planted a while ago had not been faring very well so we were asked to source and plant a second pear tree. This is it. At the same time Barley Wilson gave the original tree a good pruning. Fingers crossed.



Pear tree community orchard, photo by Barley Wilson.

Dates for diary

Saturday 9th March – litter pick morning 10.00am – 12.00 noon.

Meet at 10.00am at the village hall for to pick up litter around and about the village. We are hoping to borrow some high viz jackets from Crisp, but if you have one, please bring it along. Any volunteers would be great, please let me or Gill Waldron know. If you would like to help pick litter but cannot make the day, feel free to do so ahead of the date and place the bags of litter behind the hall.

Sunday 5th May - Dawn chorus walk. This a provisional date and is to be confirmed.

Ryburgh Spring Watch Week 5th-11th May 11th These are provisional dates and will be confirmed. Our idea is that during the week, members record what wildlife they have seen in the vaillage, and on the end Saturday come and share your sightings. We will then plot them on a map of the area, and so give us all information on where the hotspots for wildlife are in the village. Recording does not need to be complex, for example; two Ravens were seen at Highfield on 10th February (thank you Liz Savory) is sufficient. If you see a plant you want to record but cannot identify it, take a photo and we'll have a go at identifying it for you. Fingers crossed we might get records of Hedgehogs in the village.

Farm walk at Highfield led by John Savory. Likely to be June – date to be confirmed.

Sennowe walk – rather than a spring walk we are considering an autumn walk. To be confirmed.

Talk by Nick Acheson – date and details to follow.

Dersingham bog – we have decided to defer this to 2025 as we have a busy May and June this year already.

David

Membership Secretary