

Ryburgh Wildlife Group March Newsletter

Well, I think we have shaken off the worst of winter and entered the rainy season. Maybe our seasons are moving to two: wet and dry. I'm sure the amount of water and rain we've had isn't just a problem for gardeners and farmers. As I'm writing this, the A1101 at Welney is still under 42" of flood water. The last time I went to the Wildfowl and Wetlands reserve at Welney, large parts of the reserve were closed.



Thank you to those of you who volunteered to help undertake some maintenance work on the scrape. Barley captured Steve and Joe working on a nest box.

scrape working party, photo by Barley Wilson

On a recent visit around London with my nephew we ended up on the 15th floor roof garden of 120 Fenchurch Street where I spotted these hexagonal bug hotels. Not to be outdone the Tate Modern just across the River Thames had a nest box cum bug hotel attached to a birch tree. Bug hotels clearly have taken off as a simple and effective to help nature. If you come across an interesting or unusual bug hotel, please send me some details and I will share it with the group.

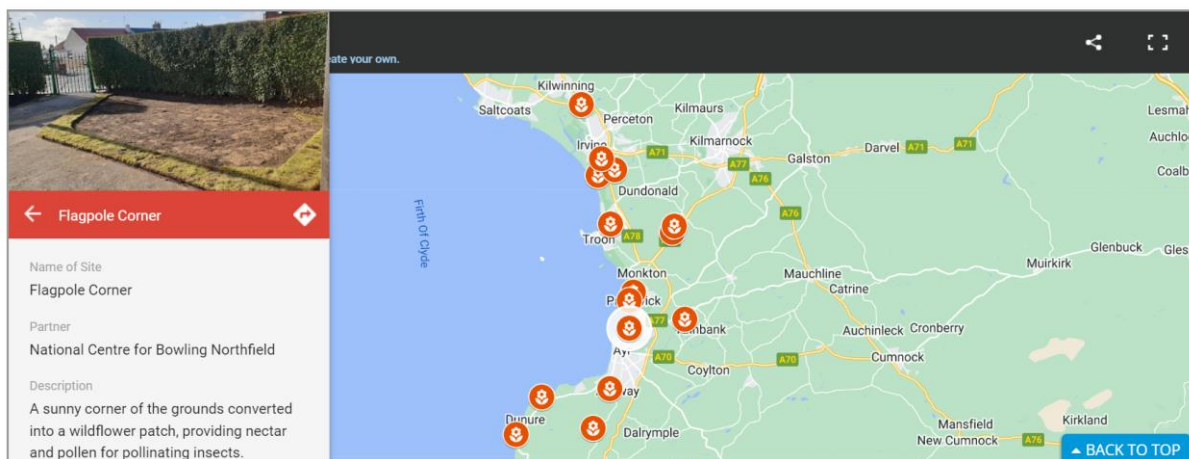


photos by David Cooling

Continuing the pollinator theme, I had a delve into the internet looking for other pollinator pathway type projects. This map is taken from the Scottish Wildlife Trust's website and relates to the Irvine to Girvan Nectar Network. Each of the little symbols on the map has a short description of what has been done there to support the project.

Should we aspire to have a local map like this for things the group or members have done to help local wildlife? What do you think? It would be great to have a map of Ryburgh with lots of little flags marking positive things we've done to help nature.

Explore the Nectar Network



The Guardian newspaper has reported on the BBC Gardeners' World annual survey which found, after years of decline in British gardens, that hedgehog numbers are increasing. In 2023, 33% of respondents to the survey reported seeing a hedgehog in their garden, up from 31% in 2022. The largest increase was in urban areas (up by 2.7 percentage points), although rural respondents also marked a small increase.

Have any of you seen a hedgehog recently? Can you let me know? Without any positive sightings from you we might have to assume that we are a hedgehog-less village.

Another idea that has taken off is enhancing awareness of the plight of nature and wildlife through art. This piece of art at Paternoster Square by St Paul's Cathedral highlights some of the world's most endangered species. The previous piece of wildlife that was here, was in the form of endangered animals sitting at a dining table having a last supper. It is now on display in the Paddington area of London. Do we have any artists hidden amongst our members with ideas on pieces of art and how to highlight some of the challenges nature faces?



Paternoster Square, London, photos by David Cooling

I mentioned previously that I had received the Nick Acheson's "geese" book for Christmas. I started reading it over the festive period then had to put it down for a while. I have now finished the book and I feel really energised and enthused to go and look at the huge goose

flocks to hunt out things like the odd Black Brant mixed in with the more usual Brent Geese. I'm also looking at Canada geese with new eyes, looking to find a Todd's Goose or even a Cackling Goose. I have to say I'm not converted to worry about Greylag geese, but who knows that may happen. The only frustrating bit is that now I've got my "goose goggles" on the majority of our winter geese have started to head back towards their summer homes. If you haven't read the book already, my advice would be, read it in August and September ready to be enthused to look at the autumn arrivals.

As we lose our winter birds and turn our attention to spring and summer birds, it's probably time to brush up on our bird song identification. If you can identify the species from the song or call, then at least you know what you are trying to see in the hedgerow. There are many apps and guides out there. I've had experience of the Merlin Bird ID app and I found it easy to use and very helpful; best of all, it's free. Download it and try it out.

Other places that are coming alive this time of year are ponds. At Titchwell recently we could hear frogs "churring" and eventually found several frogs with their heads poking out of the water but no obvious spawn. One of the reserve staff said that he'd found a number of frog and toads on the reserve dead with a single peck to their underside. He wasn't certain what had killed the frogs, but he conjectured that the culprit was Black-headed Gulls. Another busy amphibian pond was one near Chipperfield in Hertfordshire that I found while out reconnoitring a morris dancing tour. It was absolutely teeming with both mating frogs and toads. There were huge clumps of frog spawn, and yards of toad spawn. I wonder how many of these new offspring will make it to adulthood. You if look carefully you should be able to see both sorts of spawn in the image.



Photo Chipperfield Common, Hertfordshire, photo by Julie Bunker



Spawn is a sign of spring, so are some early flowers. Here's an early flowering Greater Stitchwort that was spotted locally.

photo by Barley Wilson

I'm sure we all tend to associate Yew trees with churches and churchyards. Whilst walking near the Roman Camp this past weekend, enjoying the winter sunshine, I suddenly realised that the path we were on was lined for about ¼ of a mile with an avenue of Yew trees. It reminded me of Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve near Chichester in West Sussex, and not far from where the Repair Show is filmed. Kingley Vale is known for its twisted and ancient yews and includes a grove of veteran trees which are among the oldest living things in Britain. Several are at least 500 years old, with the oldest measuring more than five metres in girth – taken from the Gov.uk website for National Nature Reserves. It, and the surrounding chalk grassland, are worth a visit but there are some steep slopes.

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.

Sunday 5th May - Dawn chorus walk. This is 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 village, 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. Last month for example; two Ravens were seen at Highfield on 10th February (thank you Liz Savory). This 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 – date to be confirmed.

Talk by Nick Acheson – date and details to follow.

Tail piece

We came across this tree recently, still living. One very tenacious tree that subscribes to the phrase “hang on in there!”.



Berkhamstead Common, Hertfordshire, photo by Julie Bunker

PS – rumour has it that the Blue Boar PH will be open for drinks on Fridays and Saturdays without the need to book starting 1st March.

David

Membership Secretary