

Ryburgh Wildlife Group April Newsletter

Easter, clocks changing, Oxford & Cambridge boat race and April Fool's Day. Wow what a busy weekend! And wow, spoiler alert for the new BBC1 Mammals programme, especially the night time filming of a Leopard hunting. The technology was so good it almost looked like a black and white film and not filmed in the pitch dark.

You might wonder why I mentioned the Oxford & Cambridge boat race. The connection is that the rowers were advised earlier in the week not to enter the River Thames due to high concentration of e-coli as a result of sewage entering the river. On the day of the race, some of the Oxford crew had been vomiting as result and being under par they lost the race. The real point is that Thames Water's new 25km super sewer tunnel is set to open and sewage outflows into River Thames, at least in London, should be a thing of the past. <https://www.tideway.london/>

A side benefit is that the construction site on the river near Rotherhithe, which had been blocking the Thames footpath, is being dismantled and very soon, you will be able to walk along that stretch of the Thames. Let's hope other water companies follow Thame's lead and tidy their act up.

Talking of tidying up a small of members volunteered to do some litter picking from the village eastwards. A great result but quite sad that some people feel it is acceptable to leave their rubbish where they like.



Photo by Jane Rundle

A theme for me this month is about challenging our mindset and expecting the unexpected. I had a few days in Scotland at the start of March and it started there.

If I said describe your experience of Goosander, you might like me have seen them in winter as a tiny speck on large open water. The Collins bird guide says breeds on lakes and slow

rivers in forested areas requiring deep clear fishing water etc. So, to say that I was a little taken aback when I saw a male and female happily swimming along the River Kelvin in central Glasgow recently would be an understatement.

Siskin, in my mind, are again birds of the winter, normally around alder, sometimes bird feeders. "The Collins" bird guide says "mixed forest, mainly spruce, alder and birch. So I did have to do a double take when I saw a small flock of Siskin hunting out seeds in the shore line debris on the coast near Fort William. And to cap it all, having got off the sleeper service from Glasgow we walked through The Regent's Park in London accompanied by early morning dog walkers and joggers, and there, in full song and in full view was a Cetti's Warbler. We had our compact binoculars with us so we could bask in the rarity of actually seeing one for once.

In readiness for our train trip to Scotland we had bought an inexpensive pair of compact binoculars we could put in our coat pockets. If you haven't got a pair, I'd recommend buying a pair. We take them everywhere now. We may have seen the back of Waxwings this year, but you never know what might pop up or fly over when you least expect it.

We had another unexpected experience walking round Holkham recently. It was a cold misty day and we could hear a "hoarse barking" noise. I thought it might be a deer but with no deer to be seen we looked blankly at each other and walked on until we found a tree where there was more "barking". Sitting in the branches of the tree were a pair of Egyptian Geese clearly in love. I don't recall any comment in Nick Acheson's book about eerie goose calls.

We've had a few warmer sunnier days now and instantly nature has responded. Brimstone, Peacock and Holly Blue butterflies have all been seen. Spring flowers are coming out too. Coltsfoot, not to be confused with a Dandelion (look carefully at the Coltsfoot's stalk), and in the community woodland in Ryburgh, Snake's Head Fritillaries – lovely. Soon it will be the turn of Bluebells and Wood Anemones and Orange Tip butterflies to delight us. I would add Dog's Mercury but it's hardly the most exciting plant, but it can be a good indicator species for ancient woodland.



Coltsfoot, photo by Julie Bunker



Snake's Head Fritillary, photo by Barley Wilson.

Following last month's newsletter one of our members, Liz Davis, asked me to remind us all to keep an eye out for Asian hornets. This is an invasive species that predate bees. There is a phone app called Asian Hornet Watch and "Gov.UK" has encouraged people to download and use this app to report possible sightings of this invasive species. Fingers crossed we don't have get any in Ryburgh and the surrounding area.

Sightings we do want to know about include Hedgehogs. We know from social media comments that members in the western end and the middle of the village have active Hedgehogs in their gardens. Do you have active Hedgehogs in your garden? Do let me know so we can add them to the records.

Two of our recent members, Vanda and Colin Richards, are volunteers for Ryston Rachel's hedgehog rescue centre in Downham Market. They regularly care for and foster hedgehogs if they are found underweight or poorly in some way. In conjunction with Steve Cale, they set up a trail camera around the scrape area to see if Hedgehogs were recorded there – sadly none were seen.

One of my brothers lives in Canada and he shared this link with me recently. Parks Canada and Alberta Parks compiled a five-minute video of a variety of wildlife using the Trans Canada highway underpasses in Banff over the last year. It's quite interesting to see all the wildlife using the "under-highway corridors" to get from one side of the road to the other without being seen or killed.

<https://kananaskis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Crossing-Structure-Video.mp4>

Just before Easter we went to Rome for a few days to celebrate my wife's birthday. I made a bit of schoolboy error and didn't do any research about what birds we might see there. As a result, we were both a little surprised to find Hooded Crows all around the city. When we

came home and I did a bit of belated research, sure enough Hooded Crows live in Italy. Interestingly Carrion Crows are absent from in Ireland, Italy, Scandinavia, parts of Spain and beyond. Who'd have thought that? I thought there were pretty much ubiquitous. The moral of the story is be prepared. We did however have our trusty Merlin bird app which identified a Serin calling while we were in a sitting have a rest amongst a pile of Roman remains – all we had to do was spot it – which we did – with the aid of our compact binoculars. It's always nice to see a new species.

Dates for diary

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

Thursday 20th June at 7.00pm Talk by Nick Acheson – Ryburgh village hall. Details to follow.

Farm walk at Highfield – date to be confirmed.

Sennowe walk – rather than a spring walk we are holding an autumn walk. Date to be confirmed.

On a BBC Countryfile programme recently, they had an article about the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's annual Big Farmland Bird Count. Perhaps this is something we could encourage our local farmers to participate in next February. One to discuss at the April committee meeting.

Tail piece

We all know and love our seaside Chip Hawks. Perhaps we should refer to this Italian cousin as a Pasta Hawk.



Yellow-Legged Gull, photo Julie Bunker

David
Membership Secretary