

Ryburgh Wildlife Group March 2025 Newsletter

The celebrations to mark the 10th anniversary of the Community Woodland went with a definite bang. Quite a few members and other villagers came out armed with pots and pans to celebrate with a Wassail organised by Holt Ridge Morris. Mike Rundle and Barley Wilson were King and Queen for the day and poured cider over the tree roots and hung slices of toast on the branches. After a hearty rendition of the Gloucestershire Wassail carol, we returned to the Memorial Hall. The afternoon and evening were rounded off by Holt Ridge Morris dancing in the hall, with liquid refreshment from the Ryburgh Pop up Pub, and food from a pizza van. A jolly good time was had by all.



Wassail King and Queen.

Since the previous newsletter we have also had our AGM and associated quiz. A small but perfectly formed small group of us met for the AGM. The accounts and minutes were all approved in the usual manner and the committee was re-elected en bloc, so you've got me writing to you for at least another year.

The quiz was fun. For the second year running my team did not win the coveted trophy. Never mind, I guess I need to start swotting up for the next quiz. Who'd have thought that a bolt of lightning is hotter than the surface of the sun, and that a beaver can swim under water for 15 minutes. If you knew these facts, you might now have been the proud holders of the quiz trophy. In my covering email I have attached the handout at the meeting.

Our list of achievements and plans for 2025 are impressive for such small group. Thank you for your support. Also it is good that we now have species lists for the Ryburgh area covering birds, moths and butterflies. My plea is that you help us keep these up to date with your sightings. Email or WhatsApp are fine.

Our plans to build relationships with key stakeholders and like-minded organisations is already bearing fruit. I can't say too much now but watch this space.

You may remember that we had some problems with unsociable behaviours at the hide that forced us to introduce a key system to access the hide. The good news is that we have sourced some new number combination padlocks that are now in place, so you no longer need a key.

Some further good news is that we have completed as much clearance of the “zombie” pond by the old railway line as we can at the moment. We shall let nature take its course over the Spring and Summer, and we look forward to seeing what wildlife the pond contains later in the year. I had a look recently myself at the pond and the work that the group has done. It is quite a transformation. Thank you to those you helped in the clearance. Also thank you to those you attended the Scrape working party in February.

On my walk around the area it was lovely to be serenaded by Skylarks who were just making sure that I kept on walking and did not stop in their little patch they called home. Maybe the prolonged grey cold days has had an impact. Things I noticed out and about were Snowdrops in abundance, and still looked great in late February (normally past their best by now); Lesser Celandines just coming into flower; and even Alexanders less luxuriant than normal. The bumblebee count stands at one, and butterfly count zero.

I know I said the butterfly count was zero, well that’s in the UK. At the end of January and start of February I had a holiday with friends in South Africa. Putting the mammals to one side (yes it was great to see them), there were just so many and varied species of butterflies. Here is small selection. I’ve not yet tried to identify them.





Unidentified butterflies from South Africa and Zimbabwe. Photos by Julie Bunker and David Cooling.

The birds were fantastic too. I thought the names were fascinating. Scarlet-Chested Sunbird – is an accurate description. Speckled Mousebird – granted it has a long tail but certainly wasn't speckled in any way. Crowned Lapwing – definitely looked like it was wearing a crown on its head. The best name was the aptly named Hadeda (Hadada) Ibis. In my mind it isn't a strikingly beautiful looking bird plumage wise – it could have been called a Grey Headed Ibis, but with its raucous "ha-de-da" call, almost like a crowing cockerel, it is obvious to see why it got its name. We mustn't forget the Penguins. It felt odd watching these cold-water birds standing on the sand in temperatures of 30°C.



Hadeda (Hadada) Ibis, African Penguin. Photos by Julie Bunker

What impressed me while I was away was the scale of the country and landscape. We were close to the Waterberg Biosphere nature reserve. It is over 654,000 hectares; that's about 2,500 square miles in area – just slightly larger than the entire county of Norfolk. Mindblowing.

Before I went away I was reading an article in British Wildlife magazine which has been running a series of articles on “Wilding for Conservation”. The article was by Benedict Dempsey, social scientist who is leading the WWF-UK's thinking on rewilding, and referred to a report WWH-UK had written, “*Bridging the divide: rewilding, farming and the triple challenge*”. The report called for a spectrum-based approach, i.e. farming, rewilding and other forms of wildlife conservation are not distinct and opposed but they actually all exist in the same spectrum. There was a strong sense from focus groups connected with the research behind the report, that the term “rewilding” was toxic and should be replaced by something like “wild corridors”. This strikes very familiar with our Pollinator Pathways. Here's to more pathways and corridors!

Dates for your diary

Ryburgh Nature Watch – dates and details to be decided

Sennowe walk - dates and details to be decided

Things to look out for in the coming weeks

My suggestions for an early butterfly were in hindsight a bit early. With warmer March weather Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Brimstones should be out and about. So too bumblebees and early migrant birds. Chiffchaff has already been seen in the area.

On the plant front look out for Lesser Celandines and Primroses. Also look out for the flowers on Hazel trees. Not the long pollen catkins but the tiny red inconspicuous flowers.

As part of knowing what wildlife is out there we'd love to know what you find. Please do send in your sightings to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com

David

Membership Secretary