

Ryburgh Wildlife Group November 2025 Newsletter

We are entering an exciting period for wildlife in the village. Autumn rain is starting to refill the two ponds that have recently been restored. For sure wildlife will follow, but what will turn up? Well, that is the exciting bit. We just don't know, and we'll have to be patient. It would be great if someone was able to monitor the ponds and keep an eye on what is turning up. You don't have to be an expert, just keen to make a regular trip and note what you see. If you find something you don't recognise, we can find an expert to help.



Pond by Stibbard cross roads. Left 10th October, right 28th October.
Photos by Davd Cooling

Another exciting activity has been the management work that's been going on at scrape by the Wensum. Over the past few years silt had accumulated, and vegetation had grown reducing the view and wildlife value of the scrape. With a big thank you to the Sennowe estate we've been able to remove the silt and vegetation. Do take a visit and see the difference. I hope we will have a longer article on this next month.



Photo by Barley Wilson.



Photo by Barley Wilson

While I made one of my visits to the pond by the Stibbard crossroads I came across a little critter sitting on a dandelion flower. The identification apps on my phone tell me it was a Long-winged conehead. It is a Bush-cricket and gets its name from the angled shape of its head.



Long-winged conehead. Photo by David Cooling

Earlier in my walk I had spotted and admired the Black Medick that was still flowering in one of the fallow fields. It is a low growing plant that is part of the legumes or clover family. It has bright yellow flowers and seeds that are black. A similar plant is the Spotted Medick. You can tell them apart as the Spotted Medick has black spots on its leaves. Both of them are important as they can fix nitrogen in the soil and improve the soil fertility.



Black Medick. Photo by David Cooling

At the start of October I had a short break in Spain and Portugal. While in Portugal I found a national newspaper that was printed in English. One of articles that took my interest was about the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). It is connected with the Gulf Stream and other Atlantic Ocean currents and acts like a conveyor belt. Warm salty water comes up from the Tropics and as it heads north the water cools. As it cools it becomes denser, and eventually the cold dense water sinks and heads back southwards to the Tropics to be warmed up again. And so the cycle starts again.

The article set out the concerns about melting polar ice which could dilute the salt water and so disrupt the “AMOC”. One result could be colder winters and shifts in the pattern of rainfall. While this may be true, our coastal waters have warmed up. As a result Blue-finned tuna fish are now seen on a regular basis around the South West coastline. These are top predators and can measure over 6m in length – that’s longer than the 2025 version of the Mini-countryman. They can weigh as much as 39stone, about a ¼ of a tonne.

I did know about Blue-fin tuna sightings but I have to confess it was one of Hamza Yassin’s wild island programme that reminded me about it. I think his current series on BBC 1 is fantastic. He is truly enthusiastic about wildlife. I think he is the new David Attenborough. The recent episode about helping Swifts in Leeds struck a chord with the committee, and its aspirations for the group in relation to Swifts, Swallows and Martins in Ryburgh. Watch this space. I’m know this will be a key focus for the group in 2026.

I don’t know about you but when I go abroad, I like to look at the plants and trees in particular. While we were in Seville we walked around some of their lovely parks and admired the trees. The guidebook referred to the “*ficus*” (weeping fig) trees as monstrous.

These are native Asia and Australia but were planted in cities like Seville for their amenity value. They are monstrosly large and apparently they actually help clean the city's atmosphere.



"*ficus*" tree Seville- monstrosly large roots. Photo by Julie Bunker.

Some good news from the Woodland Trust is that they have been conducting scientific research on Ash trees in one of their reserves. They have noticed that some younger Ash trees are developing natural resistance to the ash dieback. The work was led by Prof Richard Buggs of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. Research is ongoing so fingers crossed for our Ash trees.

The recent British Wildlife magazine sightings digest recorded two species of bee that are new to the British mainland. One of the new species was found in Catton Park in Norwich feeding on Field Scabious and the other new species was found in Suffolk. Another notable bee record for Norfolk was the first record of Ashy Furrow Bee away from the Brecklands. This species was found in Sweet Briar Marshes in Norwich and is Britain's most northerly record for this bee. Norwich to Ryburgh isn't far. Do we have any bee experts amongst us?

I'm sure we all recognise the plant, Alexanders. It's an early flowering plant and provides early nectar to insects, but it has a tendency to be invasive and overwhelm other plants. The Environment Agency is also concerned that its deep roots could compromise the structural integrity of sea wall embankments. Research has been undertaken to see what methods are best to manage and control the spread of Alexanders. It will be interesting to see what might happen to Alexanders around our coast.

I don't normally listen to BBC R4's food programme, but on 10th October I happened to be driving and joined the programme part way. I picked up two points that might be of interest. The first was a new way of fishing which meant that nets and lines were in the water for less time, thereby lessening the chances of entanglement with whales and sharks. The other idea was "alley crops". This where the target food plant is grown in between other companion plants or trees. I'm sure this is not new concept, but I'd never heard of the term "alley crops" before.

One of the group's current initiatives is to focus on special trees. To date we've had over half a dozen entries from different people. Oak trees are winning, but I'm told there's an Ash tree record and a Hawthorn record to come. We will be putting the special trees on a map so we can all see where they are. If you haven't yet filled in the form with details of your special tree, please do so and email to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com. If even you don't live directly in the village, do please send us details of your local special trees too.

Last Sunday a small number of us went for a walk in Sennowe park to see some a few of the park's special trees. Tom Cook told us lovely stories about each tree and why they were special. Two trees stood out for me. One was a pollarded Spanish Chestnut that is probably about 400 years old, and the other was a remnant Beech tree trunk, around which were a number of younger Beech trees. These outer trees had grown up at the place where the limbs of the old Beech tree had touched the ground and rooted. The old limbs, the connection to the original tree, have now largely gone.



Ring of younger Beech trees that have layered from an central trunk. Photo by David Cooling



The central Beech tree trunk that created the ring of younger trees. Photo by Barley Wilson.



Pollarded Spanish Chestnut. Photo by David Cooling.

Dates and events for your diary

Saturday 31st January 2026 – 4.15pm 2nd annual Wassail! with Holt Ridge Morris.

This will take the same format as last year with the celebration in the community woodland followed by morris dancing in the memorial hall. The Pop-up-Pub will also be in attendance so too will be Askers woodfired pizza van.

Date and time to be confirmed but we will be holding the AGM early next year. We plan to have a talk following the AGM on the work of the local hedgehog sanctuary.

Advert

At the most recent committee meeting I got my copies of the 2026 calendar. They look great. My family don't know this yet, but they've got calendars for their Christmas presents this year. The price of the calendar is £9.50. They are available from the village shop, or you can order directly from Gill Waldron by phone - 01328 829158. All the photos have been taken by members of the wildlife group. We have some talented photographers.

Do buy one or two or.....

Tail Piece

If you haven't signed up to join the RWG Members WhatsApp group but would like to please let me know.



Spooky Beech trees in the Chilterns. Photos by David Cooling

David

Membership Secretary