

Ryburgh Wildlife Group

January 2026 Newsletter

Happy New Year and welcome to 2026. I hope you had a good Christmas.

At the start of the year we often look back at what we've done over the previous year and plan the future year. We are no different and we will do that at the AGM on Monday 2nd February. Please do come along.

From a wildlife perspective 2025 was quite an extraordinary year. Between the end of August and October the UK was visited by hundreds of Glossy Ibis. Large flocks were recorded in Norfolk, Suffolk and even Greater London. Is this a sign of things to come? We also had a Black-winged Kite that visited Norfolk while wandering around the UK. Was this and the ibises nest site reconnaissance visits. Wouldn't it be fantastic if they were. It would certainly keep those birders who have year records on their toes.

It's amazing how the world changes around us and sometimes it passes us by. I had a week-long holiday on the Isle of Wight at the end of November and had forgotten all about the reintroduced eagles there. While out walking through Niton on the southern tip of the island a chap spoke to me and asked what birds I'd seen. "Corvids and that was about it." The local then talked about eagles, ospreys and red squirrels, and the best places to find them.

We finished our walk, skirting Black Gang Chine's amusement park - it wasn't like that when I holidayed there over 50 years ago, and had sufficient time to drive to Newtown harbour before sunset. We spotted a very large bird in a very distant tree and thought to ourselves, it could be an eagle. Just as we were about to leave all the birds flew up. Brent Geese, gulls, wader, ducks; the sky was filled with birds and then majestically gliding through them all was a White-tailed Eagle, that obligingly grabbed a fish for supper and flew off to post to eat it. It was exhilarating.

We returned later in the week for a near repeat performance. Distant bird in a distant tree but alas, no supper fishing trip. Talking to the locals in the hide the adult male appears just to be interested in holding his territory. He's chased the younger birds away and is not interested in mating with the local female. Let's hope they do get round to breeding.

Ospreys are now breeding in Poole Harbour area and in 2025 a pair of Ospreys raised at least one chick at Ranworth Broad. What will 2026 hold?

I read an article that amused and worried me at the same time. Some time ago Spain donated Red Kite chicks to the help the reintroduction programme in the UK. The roles have now reversed, and the UK is now sending back chicks Spain as the numbers have declined there. That's not a headline I expected (or wanted) to read.

Red Kites are masters of the sky but on the ground they hop along in a very ungainly fashion. On a recent late afternoon, I was watching several kites circling in the sky and as

the light dropped ever so slowly the kite numbers dwindled. I then watched one kite fly into an oak tree to roost. A quick ruffle of its feather and it was gone from sight. It just blended into the tree. I knew it was there but, unless you'd have seen it fly in, you would have thought it was just a large branch of the tree.

I wrote an article about hunting the Hairstreak butterflies in Ryburgh for the most recent newsletter of the Norfolk branch of Butterfly Conservation. We have potentially three species in Ryburgh: Green; White-letter; and Purple. We know that Green Hairstreak exist on the common, also have been seen in Mill Road in the past, and I'm pretty sure (hopefully to be confirmed in 2026) that our many oak trees hold populations of Purple Hairstreaks. As for White-letter Hairstreaks....we need elm trees. I have seen White-letter Hairstreaks elsewhere and they are tricky butterflies to spot. An easier way to determine if you've got White-letter Hairstreaks is to search for their eggs in the winter. Below is an image of a White-letter Hairstreak egg.



Photo by Peter Eeles. Butterfly Conservation.

A butterfly conservation member from Acle has been in contact with me and has kindly offered to help us search for eggs. Watch this space.

I've written quite a bit about trees and our special tree project. Well over Christmas I've experimented trying to create a Google map of special trees. I've shared a prototype with the committee. It seemed to work ok but it needs more work. If you have created your own map using Google Maps please share with me any hints and tips you may have.

I know we tend to think of trees of being big and strong, I saw this tree while out walking recently and reminded my quite how shallow rooted most trees are. The trunk of the tree which is out of view was still happily growing. I can't work out what the small round holes might be in root plate soil. Any ideas?



Photo by Julie Bunker.

I don't normally write reviews of television programmes but I thought the Dr Who spin off, *The War Between The Land And Sea*, contained a couple of powerful messages. Spoiler alert just in case you wanted to watch it but haven't had the chance yet. One image was when the sea returned to the land all the plastic that we have dumped into the sea. The second was when the *Homo aqua* being asked the spokesperson for the Earth to have a drink a glass of rather murky water that had been taken from the River Thames, saying this is what *Homo aqua* has to put up with. I also thought the ending was quite powerful when a jogger was asked, or should that be, instructed, to pick up the plastic bottle he had dropped into the sea.

The rain we have had recently is certainly helping fill our recently restored ponds. Ponds are really valuable but not always for reasons we expect. I remember a large pond on Epsom Common called the Stew Pond. It got the name because the local nearby manor house used it to hold fish for meals. My late uncle proudly told us that his school walked children across the common to the pond so they could learn to swim in it. The nearest school was called Pound Lane and was built on the site of the old animal pound. The image below is of a local animal pound near North Elmham.



North Elmham pond. Photo by Julie Bunker.

Dates and events for your diary

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

The event will start from the Memorial Hall with some dances before processing to the community woodland for the celebration. Following the celebration there will be more dancing in the memorial hall along with tea and cakes. We intend to play some folk music tunes during the evening too. If you have an instrument that you can easily transport and you fancy playing some folk tunes, do bring them along and join in.

Last year Barley and Mike from the committee became the Wassail Queen and King. Let's hope for new temporary monarchs this year. Feel free to put your name in the frame.

The Pop-up-Pub will also be in attendance so too will be Askers woodfired pizza van.

Monday 2nd February 2026 – Ryburgh Wildlife Group AGM

This will be in the memorial hall annex. The AGM will recap what the Group has achieved this year; how our local wildlife hotspots are faring; its finances; and our plans for 2026.

Do come along. We still have space for a couple more committee members. If you like to become a committee member, please let us know.

After the formal AGM there will be an illustrated talk by Janet Smith on hedgehogs: the challenges they face; how people can help; and the work of Ryston Rachel's Hedgehog Hotel. We all know hedgehogs are in trouble and I'm sure this will be a fascinating talk.

Do please register by email to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com for the AGM and the talk. No charge for the event but donations welcomed.

Caption Corner and winner from last month



We had a few good suggestions for a caption. *"A Tree-Mendous gathering."* *"After lengthy discussion, no one could recall why they were there."* But I think the winner is John's:

"It was already like this when I got here.....sir".

David

Membership Secretary

PS – just in case you were concerned about Red Squirrel harm. Here is the unadulterated image. They are quite partial to raw carrot.



Red squirrel at Quarr Abbey. Photo by Julie Bunker

I leave you with something to ponder on.

It is reported that the UK uses around 227,000 miles of wrapping paper a year. Doing what I and my former boss called guerilla maths, that means we could wrap the Earth nearly nine times, and had we have started unrolling the paper at 30 miles per hour at one minute past minute on the 1st January, we wouldn't stop unrolling until around 12th November.

HAPPY NEW YEAR