

Ryburgh Wildlife Group

July 2026 Newsletter

June was a record-breaking month with rather colourful roller coaster of weather; and it looks July will follow in its footsteps. July 2026 is an important month. It is when the England football team earn their second star for their shirts by winning the World Cup. Well, one can dream.

Having pinched myself over the nation's football hope, I pinched myself again when I saw cereal crops that almost looked ready to harvest in June. I also saw a programme where Charles Dyson was growing strawberries in a long rotating cylinder where the ripe fruit was picked individually by a machine. A mere £200m capital investment that is delivering 24x7 self-sufficient circular farming. As the song Star Trekkin would have said, "it's farming Jim, but not as we know it".

During the month we had a successful pond dipping event. This is an article from Ian Wilson about it.

Zombie Pond

A "zombie pond" is an historical pond which has become overgrown with trees and shrubs. The resulting heavy shade and litter sediment leaves very little life in them. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, the wildlife group recently helped with the restoration of one next to the old railway line, clearing most of the above ground vegetation the winter before last. Last autumn, a large digger removed the stumps and cleared out the silt back to the original clay base of the pond.

Already in the first summer results have been amazing, with long-buried water crowfoot seeds germinating and recolonising the pond. Stoneworts have also appeared, usually a sign of good water quality. An insect species list compiled during the pond dipping event in mid-June revealed lots of egg-laying dragonflies from four species (Emperor, broad-bodied and four-spotted chasers, plus black-tailed skimmer. Also many common blue damselflies.

The water is clear, helped by the presence of many water fleas (*Daphnia*) which eat single-celled algae and form the basis of the food chain. The pond already supports damselfly and dragonfly nymphs, mayfly larvae, whirligig and great diving beetles, plus lesser and greater water boatmen.

The pond can be found at what3words: lookout.insurers.defectors (just to the Mill Road side of the old railway line)



September 2025. Photo by Barley Wilson



Mid-June 2026; Water crowfoot with Emperor dragonfly. Photo by Ian Wilson (video capture)

Norfolk Hawker arrives in Ryburgh

Speaking of dragonflies, one of our members in Great Ryburgh reported a first for his pond, a male Norfolk Hawker. These have their UK stronghold in the Norfolk Broads, but in recent years there have been reports of them making their way up the River Wensum. Now they have arrived in Ryburgh. They have brown bodies but unlike the Brown Hawker have distinctive green eyes.



Norfolk Hawker in Great Ryburgh (Photo by Ian Wilson; phone so a bit blurry!)

Ian Wilson

One of the groups key projects for this year was to record the status of our Swallows., Swifts and House Martins. All these species are facing difficulties so we have been looking to baseline their status so we can compare year on year changes. Below is an update from Ian Wilson.

Swifts, swallows, and house martins survey

Volunteers in the form of John Hopkins, Nick Parsons, and Ian Wilson have begun surveying the village for signs of nesting swifts, swallows, and house martins. This is of course mainly from the road side of houses, and particularly in the case of swallows misses outbuildings etc to the rear.

The three species do have different nesting requirements;

Swifts usually nest under tiles so the only sign is birds entering or leaving. Young birds looking for a nest site also “bang” likely tiles or gutters with their wings to see if anyone is home.

Swallows nest on rafters in outbuildings with open entrances, or sometimes verandahs or porches.

House martins glue their mud nests to the top of walls, sheltered by the overhanging roof above.

So if you are aware of any nests please let Ian Wilson know at wildponds@gmail.com. If you're not sure and would be happy for one of us to visit and check for you then please also get in touch.

Nick Parsons reports a mixed picture. On the positive side all four of his House Martin boxes are occupied. Also, for the first time in six years he has Swallows attempting to nest in an outbuilding. Best of all after 13 years of trying a pair of Swifts is using one of his boxes. The most Swifts seen overhead was 15, but generally just 3 - 4 flying about.

On the negative side, in the stretch from the bridge, past the Blue Boar to the village hall, only one building close to the old school appears to have Swifts attempting to breed. A “banger” has also been spotted at the same place.

John Hopkins was surveying Mill Road and at the start of June he reported:

- Swift - up to three seen regularly but found no sign of breeding yet
- Swallow a pair produced young at one house but the chicks died in the nest during the heat wave at the end of May. In addition, at a house where breeding took place last year disappointingly there was no evidence this year
- House Martins 16 nests boxes spread over three houses were being occupied

Hugh Lanham also reported a few (at least three) Swifts in Little Ryburgh.

Swifts are amazing birds. Apparently they can go off for days at a time and follow weather systems where there is good feeding. Fortunately the young Swiftlets can survive longer without food than other species.

As an aside, I was at Vauxhall in South London morris dancing late last Friday evening and we were treated to several circuits of screaming Swifts. Lovely way to round off the day.

Thank you Ian, John, Nick and Hugh for the updates above.

A good news story is that an owl nest box erected in an outbuilding belonging to one of our members was used by a pair of Barn Owls that raised four young.

Behind the scenes the committee is still in dialogue with various organisations. Below is a summary from Barley Wilson from the **NWT Community Network Planning gathering 27th May at Ranworth** that she and Ian Wilson attended on behalf of the group.

The event was hosted by Gemma Walker (NWT Wilder Communities Manager), Lindsay and Maggie (NCC Natural Norfolk), and other groups attending included Greening Wymondham, South Yare Group, Aylsham Climate Emergency, N+N Bat Group, Bilston Environment Group, and Forncett Group.

We discussed the results of community groups networking survey showing a general preference for mixed size networking events, held at a mix of locations, and generally more than once a year. Breakout group discussion looked at priority topics that would best support local groups e.g. fundraising, site management, engaging younger volunteers to join community groups.

- There was further discussion on the “Great Collaboration” initiative that NWT are going to be able to use to provide a map-based database linking local community groups.
- The idea of a “festival of hope” campfire event to engage environmental activists of all ages was discussed.
- The supply of “biodiversity boxes” or “borrow boxes” of useful tools/equipment for community groups was discussed.
- News of funding for a post to support and engage community group networking was announced to all round approval!

Networking and sharing ideas with other community environmental groups always gives much-needed encouragement!

Barley Wilson

Tailpiece



I took this image of a 1767 map on the floor of a barn at the Lord Nelson in Burnham Thorpe. Note the “T junction” of tracks just east of the bridge in Great Ryburgh. Also the church at Pudding Norton was already in ruins by then.

David

Membership Secretary