



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2024



River Aire in autumn photographed from the River Path
by Barbara Murphy

Latest News

This summer seems to have flown by with autumn arriving particularly early and Storm Lilian bringing strong to gale force winds on 23rd August. Fortunately, there was little damage to trees on the Reserve but there was quite a bit of clearing up to do.

A count of 92 Swallows on overhead wires by the Visitor Centre on 1st September was much higher than any counts last year and an early reminder that autumn was on its way and summer visitors were starting to drift south. At least one pair nested in the dumper truck shed again this year and three young were photographed on the top of the door there - see back cover.

By the time you read this newsletter our last big event of the year, Aireborough Rotary Club's Autumn Seed Trail will have taken place and will hopefully have been as successful as it was last year. We now just have the Halloween Event to look forward to on Sunday 27th October. Details of this can be found on our website.



Tommy with his bat detector

Photo by Denese Swann

Our Bat Nights are always very popular and all three public events were quickly booked up this year. Using our bat detectors participants are able to record four species - Noctule, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Daubenton's Bat and there is always the chance of spotting a Barn Owl as was the case during the second event on Saturday 24th August. There is no charge for these events but numbers are limited to 25 persons. Sadly 11 people failed to turn up for this particular evening and there was no time to invite others who would have liked to attend

Finally, don't forget to order your Rodley Nature Reserve 2025 Calendar. These are now available in the Visitor Centre or by post. Further details are shown later in this Newsletter.

Subscriptions

Thank you for being a Friend of Rodley Nature Reserve. Your support is greatly appreciated. The annual subscription has stood at a suggested minimum of £7 for more than 15 years now and unfortunately it is no longer sufficient to cover the cost of four quarterly Newsletters by post and an Annual Review which Friends are entitled to. It is therefore proposed to increase the minimum subscription to £10 with effect from 1st January 2025.

Nest Box Update

We can now report that all three young in the Barn Owl box on the scrubland fledged successfully. The box and the camera were cleaned out by the experts early in September so we should have some rather clearer images on the monitor in the visitor centre for hopefully another successful nesting season in 2025.

Tim's Field



It was in May 1999 that work started on digging out the areas that would become the Lagoon, Duck Marsh, Reedbed and Wet Grassland. But what to do with the huge amount of soil that would be excavated? Fortunately a solution was at hand - the Snipe Meadow, a sunken field of some six acres that would later become Tim's Field. The excavated soil was dumped and spread here.



Linnets - photo by Peter Humphrey

Linnets are very much a winter visitor to the Reserve and the UK population has been in decline for years. On 10th February 2012 a flock photographed over the field was found to contain an astonishing 597 birds, drawn in by an abundant crop of Fodder Radish seed. Flocks are much smaller these days with just the occasional three figure count reported.



Tim's Field is sown each spring with a mixture of seed bearing crops such as Triticale, Kale, Fodder Radish and Quinoa to provide a sustained source of food for wild birds throughout the winter months. The field comes into its own for the birdwatcher during the autumn and winter months. Passage visitors such as Stonechats can be seen here in September and October as they pause to feed up before moving on.



The small resident population of Chaffinches can increase considerably in the winter months with an influx of visitors drawn in by the seed crop on the field. These birds may well be winter visitors from Northern Europe. It's always worth looking out for the odd Brambling among them.

Visitors might wonder why the margins of Tim's Field are left rough and overgrown. This is all part of the Harvest Mouse super highway to enable these tiny creatures to move freely around the field.

Fungi: More than just mushrooms and not just in autumn!

September and October tend to be the height of the mushroom season but fungi can be found all year round, if you look carefully. We have found several interesting spring species at Rodley Reserve this year. Two of those were Vinegar Cup and Thimble Morel, seen side by side.



The Vinegar Cup is goblet shaped with a peculiar ribbed stem. It doesn't smell of vinegar but is named after its supposed resemblance to a Roman vinegar bowl. This was found under the Hawthorn hedge that runs along part of the entrance drive. Thimble Morel was growing alongside it. Both species are related to the highly prized edible morels. Neither are common and are supposed to be found on

limestone soils. There's probably a good deal of concrete under that area from the old sewage works filter beds, giving the soil a chalky feel.



Under the same hedge but closer to the visitor centre was a third interesting species, Saint George's Mushroom. It is called this as it traditionally appears around Saint George's Day (April 23rd). That was true for the south of England maybe but up until a few years ago they only appeared in our area, normally, around the middle of May. Given the strange weather we are having it's no surprise that we are finding them in early April. We were looking under the Hawthorn for another species - Hawthorn Cup, which we didn't find fruiting so will have to try again next spring for that.



There are other fungi that are found more often in winter or the height of summer and some large bracket species that can be seen all year round. Some good examples of these are in the willow coppice and can be seen through the fence from the path outside. Large specimens of Artist's Bracket grow on some of the willows. In the same area a beautiful winter species was also viewable from the Willow Path, Scarlet Elfcup.

Andy Woodall

Photos by Andy Woodall

Work at the Dragonfly Ponds



Our Summer Newsletter featured an article about the major maintenance programme that was underway at the dragonfly ponds this year. The overgrown marsh area had been cleared and it had been thought that the old liner there might be reusable but that proved not to be the case. A new liner measuring 20m x 15m was delivered early in September and on Monday 9th September all the volunteers working that day were needed to lift it into place. Water was then pumped from the Wet Grassland to fill it.

This will be the biggest single body of water at the ponds and should appeal to those species such as Common Blue Damselfly that prefer larger areas of water.

2025 Calendar



It's that time of year again!

Calendars are now available in the Visitor Centre for £6.50 pay by cash or card.

From 1st November you will also be able to order them to be delivered. Prices start from £8.75 including postage, depending on the number ordered.

Email us from 1st November to arrange payment and delivery at

info@rodleynaturereserve.org

The Mysteries of Moths

Many people think of moths as little brown things that eat holes in clothes, and whilst such species do exist and this does happen, the Common Clothes Moth is now regarded as rare and a very local resident being last recorded in Yorkshire in 1989. Unfortunately there are other species that like wool!



Poplar Hawk-moth

There are approx. 2500 species of moth in the UK and, since 2001 when recording commenced, the Reserve has managed to record a meagre 448. The moth mystery is compounded by the fact the majority only appear at night and are rarely seen but fortunately they are attracted to light and during the summer months the Reserve holds a series of trapping events to introduce visitors and particularly children to their existence. Species coming to light are very varied and range from "micros" like the Apple Leaf-miner (forewing 4mm) to "macros" like the Poplar Hawk-moth (forewing 46mm). Trapping is a humane procedure and moths are returned to the wild unharmed after being identified.

The classification of moths into two groups - micros (usually smaller moths but there are larger ones) and macros (usually larger moths but there are smaller ones) - is yet another mystery.



Humming-bird Hawk-moth

I suspect many readers won't realise that certain moth species are actually migrants that travel across from the continent each year before arriving at Rodley. Bearing in mind the size of the moths and the distance to be travelled it remains a remarkable achievement. The Humming-bird Hawk-moth spotted in August 2022, the Silver Y and the Diamond-back moths are all visitors and will more than likely have taken this route. There are thoughts that certain migrant species have now settled here but a large influx of these species is still recorded at the coast each year.

The species with the most air miles has to be the Indian Meal moth which was recorded regularly in the Visitor Centre between 2017 and 2020 but the mystery was quickly solved realising that large bags of what was presumably imported bird food were being stored nearby.

Interestingly there is a bit of a mystery surrounding the Chamomile Shark and Mullein moths with several larvae records over the years for each species but as yet no record for an adult.

The intriguing names of many of the species just add to the mystery with records for the Reserve of the following – Angle-striped Sallow 08/2012, Beautiful Hook-tip 07/2023, Blair’s Shoulder-knot 10/2017, Brown-line Bright-eye 07/2018, Gold Spangle 07/2023, Maiden’s Blush 08/24 and a favourite for the Reserve the Old Lady with records going back to 2009, to name but a few.



Maiden’s Blush

Trapping activity has now finished for 2024 but check the website and social media for future events likely to commence in May 2025.

Dave Nesham

The Gatekeeper

2024 has been a difficult year for our butterflies countrywide. The results of Butterfly Conservation’s Big Butterfly Count show that butterfly numbers are well down this year and this has certainly been the case here on the Reserve.

The Gatekeeper had a very good year here in 2023 and has probably been one of the most numerous butterflies here this year. July and August are the months to find this species and Poplar Field is usually one of the most productive sites, providing just the habitat that Gatekeepers need - tall grasses growing close to hedges, trees and shrubs.

Until we start looking closely at photographs of butterflies we perhaps don’t realise just how many aberrations can occur. The colour and the pattern on the wings of this particular species are very variable and around a dozen aberrations have been named so far.



The above photograph shows what we think of as the normal form with one eyespot on each forewing. The photograph below was taken on the Reserve on 28th July this year and is an aberration known as *ab.excessa*. This has been looked at by an expert on aberrations and we understand it is quite rare though a few are seen each year.



Gatekeeper *ab.excessa*

Photographed by Elaine Lessani

Aberrations can apparently occur for a number of reasons, including extremes in temperature, while the butterfly is developing in the chrysalis.



Juvenile Barn Swallows waiting for their next feed before leaving on migration - photo by Mandy Haxby

Reserve Opening Times
Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday 9am - 5pm (4pm Nov – end Feb)
Visitor Centre Opening Times
Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday 10am - 4pm (3.30pm Nov- end Feb)

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