



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Winter/Spring 2025



Otter with juvenile
Photograph by Kirsty McLeod

Latest News



Last year's holes in the Sand Martin nesting bank on the Lagoon have been cleared out and refilled and by the time you read this Newsletter the first birds may well have arrived or be not too far away. Hopefully, the new Swift nesting tower will also have some occupants this year. This is an exciting time for the birdwatcher with a host of other summer visitors to look and listen for in the coming weeks.

After a successful nesting season last year we hoped that the Kestrels and Barn Owls would be back again in their nest boxes this year and thanks to having cameras in the boxes we know that they are. Both male and female Kestrels visited their box in February and on occasions brought in small rodents to feed on. They were even observed mating on top of the Barn Owls' nest box on the scrubland!



As regards the Barn Owls both birds have been in residence in their box most days.

With no camera in their box in the Manager's Garden it is difficult to know for certain whether the Little Owls are permanently in residence but the photograph on the back cover gives a good indication!

We again have a full programme of events planned for this year and the first two have already taken place - the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and Build a Nest Box. You can read about both these events in this Newsletter.

The next one to look forward to is Aireborough Rotary Club's ever popular Grand Easter Egg Hunt which takes place on Easter Sunday 20th April and raises valuable funds for local charities.

Aireborough Rotary Club
GRAND EASTER EGG HUNT
Rodley Nature Reserve
LS13 1HP

SUNDAY 20th APRIL
11:00am - 3:00pm GAMES
FREE ENTRY TOMBOLA
REFRESHMENTS
HONEY STALL

No Dogs allowed on the Reserve
except Assistance Dogs

all donations to local charities
please bring cash for stalls
book your time slot at:
www.ticketsource.co.uk/aireboroughrotary

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Charity Number 507700

This is a great event for families so to avoid disappointment remember to book your time slot.

The Wet Grassland



Photo by Barbara Murphy

We still call it the Wet Grassland but with the gradual encroachment of common reed it is probably now more akin to fenland these days. Good numbers of wildfowl can be seen on it at certain times of the year but quite often it can be challenging to see any waterbirds here. But go into one of the hides overlooking the area and the regular birdwatchers there will invariably have their telescopes focused on one of the more elusive species.



Photo by Barbara Murphy

Snipe breed throughout Britain but numbers are much higher in winter when we get birds from as far east as Russia. They can be found on the Reserve all year round and the Wet Grassland is a good place to find them but they can be very difficult to spot.

Much smaller than the Snipe, the Jack Snipe is a scarce passage/winter visitor on the Reserve with most sightings from October through to

April. This year it had been reported on seven dates as at 23rd February. Like its larger cousin it can be very difficult to spot and the use of thermal telescopes by one or two birdwatchers has proved a big advantage.



Photo by John W Cooper

The Jack Snipe has an unusual bouncy action when it is feeding which can help to give it away. The long bank of reeds along the far side of the Wet Grassland has proved to be a good spot to find these two species in the winter months.



Photo by Peter Humphrey

Water Rails can be found on all four main wetland areas but the Wet Grassland can be a good place to spot this species. They breed on the Reserve but it is also a winter visitor from Europe. Being a very secretive species it tends to be more often heard than seen with its pig-like squeal.

Otters



Photo from trail camera video January 2022

2022 had been the best year ever for daytime sightings of Otters on the Reserve with an adult and two juveniles seen on numerous occasions on the river and wetlands. In 2023 there were sightings in 10 months of the year with peak activity in February – 15 sightings all on the Lagoon and with two animals on several occasions. After two such good years 2024 proved to be very disappointing with only nine sightings reported - one on the Lagoon, two on the Duck Marsh and six on the river.

Otters can travel long distances on the river system and so the number of sightings is almost certainly going to vary considerably from year to year. This year an adult and two juveniles were filmed on the river just by the bridge on 19th January and on 1st February two were watched on the Lagoon. February again proved to be a productive month this year.

Sitting in the Willow Path Hide on 22nd February, listening to Cetti's Warblers calling on both sides, three ducks suddenly "exploded" out of the reeds surrounding the Kingfisher nesting bank. Would an Otter or American Mink suddenly appear in the same area? Fortunately, it was an Otter and not just one but two Otters and one was chewing something it had just caught. It is well known that Otters

feed on fish but they will also take, frogs, birds and shellfish. In the latter case this would be Swan Mussels which can be found in the river and on some of the wetland areas.



Photo by Christian Rawson 22nd February

After a few moments both animals swam to the near bank to the left of the hide and disappeared from sight. After a little while one suddenly appeared again and swam past the hide only yards away.



Photo by Barbara Murphy 22nd February

On 27th February an adult Otter and a juvenile were photographed on the river. Young Otters typically stay with the family for a year before they take off on their own. Let us hope that some of our visitors will experience similar memorable moments this year and please do remember to record all your sightings in the book in the visitor centre.

Big Garden Birdwatch Weekend – 25th & 26th January

The Big Garden Birdwatch has been running for 46 years and is a continued display of the love for our wildlife, made possible by the RSPB. The dark days of January guides the timing of the Big Garden Birdwatch – the world's largest garden wildlife survey. Every year hundreds of thousands of nature lovers take part and with birds now facing so many challenges due to the nature and climate emergencies, every count matters.

We here at Rodley always like to do our bit, so once again we invited local families to come and join us for an hour to sit back, relax and count the birds. We also had the support of Joanne from the RSPB who challenged everyone to match six bird calls to the relevant birds. There was a starling, a blackbird, a robin, a goldfinch and a blue tit, but how many of you correctly identified the puffin call?

Our 'Guides in the Hides' set up in the Manager's Garden Hide to help families identify the birds but as the weather was cold and then turned very wet and windy, the birds seemed to do what they always do on Big Garden Bird Watch weekend – they disappeared!

After counting the few birds that did brave the weather for some much-needed food, children came inside from the cold and whilst mums and dads enjoyed a warming cuppa and some home-made cake, they got messy and made bird feeders with the help of our volunteers. They then very carefully carried them home in paper bags to hang up in their own gardens, so the hungry birds could eat too.



Making bird feeders

A big thank you as always to those of you who came and joined in the fun to support us! It is always nice to meet and talk to new families who haven't visited us before. We hope that you will visit us again soon.

Denese Swann

RNR Events Coordinator

Look for the Scarlet Elfcup

September and October tend to be the height of the mushroom season and this year's Fungus Foray takes place on Sunday 19th October but fungi can be found at other times of the year too.



Photo by Andy Woodall

If you are on the Willow Path look out for the beautiful Scarlet Elfcup growing in the Coppice close to the fence and almost in line with the Duck Marsh hide. It can usually be found there between January and into April.

Build a Nest Box - Sunday 16th February

Hot off the heels of The Big Garden Birdwatch is National Nest Box Week, which runs from 14-21 February. It is the time to show even more love to our feathered friends by supplying them with their very own 'love nest'.



Harriet building her nest box

Some of the birds you may have seen feeding in your gardens and green spaces over winter could well be visitors from Northern Europe and they will be starting to get the urge to head back. Birds such as Blackbirds and Robins are among these, adding to the resident population of both species over the winter months. Some of "our" Blackbirds and Robins do fly south to places as far away as Spain and Portugal for the winter but they will be returning to join the residents prospecting for suitable nest sites.

Nestboxes fulfil two valuable roles: shortly before the start of spring they help birds to prepare for the breeding season, as wild birds slowly start looking for suitable breeding sites. In winter artificial nesting aids offer protection from the wind and weather, making them ideal places to spend the winter.

The increasing changes in natural habitats pose a serious challenge for birds: suitable breeding sites are becoming increasingly rare. So nest boxes are the solution.



With a little help from our volunteers
May builds herself a nest box

Many local families came and spent a few hours with us today to build nest boxes. There was lots of frantic hammering of nails into wood, but with the help of Rodley's very patient volunteers, sturdy nest boxes emerged from the chaos!



Cassandra taking home her
completed nest box

Very proud new nest box owners could be seen carrying them home in anticipation of them being put up in trees or on walls, ready for the birds to move in. Children also enjoyed making simple bird feeders which they took home to hang up for the hungry birds.

Thank you as always for supporting our event.

Denese Swann

RNR Events Coordinator

Rodley Nature Reserve Events 2025

<p style="text-align: center;">SPRING BIRD WALK</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">SUNDAY 4 MAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A FAMILY WALK LEARN HOW TO IDENTIFY BIRDS BY THEIR SONG</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MEET AT THE MAIN CAR PARK (NEAR THE RIVER)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SUPERVISED POND DIPPING</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">RESTARTS SATURDAY 24 MAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COME AND SEE WHAT CREATURES LIVE IN OUR PONDS</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC DIPPING PONDS</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">NATURE QUEST DAY</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">SATURDAY 19 JULY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A DAY FULL OF WILDLIFE ACTIVITIES FOR ALL THE FAMILY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">VISITOR CENTRE AREA AND AROUND THE RESERVE</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">FUNGUS FORAY</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">SUNDAY 19 OCTOBER</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LEARN WHICH FUNGI LIVES AT RODLEY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">VISITOR CENTRE AREA AND AROUND THE RESERVE</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">HALLOWEEN</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COME IN FANCY DRESS AND ENJOY SOME HALLOWEEN FUN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">VISITOR CENTRE AREA AND AROUND THE RESERVE</p>

Remember to check our website for Moth Trap Opening events which will be taking place in May and June



A pair of Little Owls in the Manager's Garden
Photographed on February 19th by Peter Humphrey

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)

Telephone No. on open days 0113 2040441

For Rodley Nature Reserve Trust Matters:

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RODLEY NATURE RESERVE

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Website: www.rodleynaturereserve.org