



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024



Brimstone butterfly— an early spring species

Photograph by Barbara Murphy

Latest News

Already classified as one of the world's most nature depleted countries the State of Nature Report 2023 shows that our wildlife continues to decline at an alarming rate. Birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, flowering plants, fungi and lichens are all affected but birds particularly so.

The UK's biodiversity had already been depleted by hundreds of years of habitat loss, unsustainable farming practices and development but the effects of climate change are also proving a major cause of nature loss. The 5th Birds of Conservation Concern review was published in December 2021. Birds that breed or overwinter here are assessed and placed on the Green, Amber or Red Lists to indicate an increasing level of conservation concern. With 70 species on it the Red List is longer than ever before and almost double the length of what it was in the first review in 1996.

New Red Listed species include Swift, House Martin and Greenfinch. All three are showing marked declines locally, in the latter case not helped by the disease Trichomonosis which has affected this species very badly. In this Newsletter you will find an article about Swifts, House Martins, Sand Martins and Barn Swallows most of which will have arrived here from Africa by the time you read this.

It's only thanks to many years of extensive monitoring that we know how much we have lost. The RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch has provided valuable data about our garden birds for more than 40 years and this year it returned for its 45th year in late January. We again ran a successful event celebrating this on the weekend of 27th and 28th January followed by a Build a Nest Box Event on Sunday 18th February for National Nest Box Week. Involving children in nature is an

important part of our work and both these events were particularly aimed at families.

A very wet March didn't bode well for Aireborough Rotary Club's annual Grand Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday but the event enjoyed a dry albeit cool day with a chilly north easterly breeze and was, as always, very well supported. You can read about all three of these events in this Newsletter.

Several more events are planned for later in the year and you can find details on the back cover. Entry is free for them all. For further details visit our website at

www.rodleynaturereserve.org

In our Winter Newsletter we featured an article about the Little Owls and their new nest box in the Manager's Garden. Despite frequent takeover attempts by the Grey Squirrels the owls were still in residence at the time of writing and have become the most popular birds to see and photograph here on the Reserve. They have almost reached celebrity status with dozens of photographs appearing on social media in recent weeks and many new photographers paying a visit.

Having cameras in our other larger nest boxes and being able to relay live images to monitors in the Visitor Centre has certainly been a big plus point. The Kestrels have been seen bringing prey back to their box and one Barn Owl is often to be seen in its box on the Scrubland. Let us hope for a successful year for all three species.

Hirundines and Swifts

Sand Martins, House Martins, Barn Swallows and Swifts are all summer visitors spending the winter in Africa. The Sand Martin is among the earliest of our summer visitors to arrive. It is a colonial nester excavating its nest holes in sandy river banks but it also takes readily to man-made nesting banks which is the case here at Rodley.



Since its completion early in 2014 it has proved to be highly successful but the number of nest holes has reduced in recent years from 180 in 2019 to 133 in 2021, 67 in 2022 and just 35 last year. In the Birds of Conservation Concern review this species was moved from the Amber to the Green List in 2015 due to an upward trend in the population so why the numbers are reducing here on the Reserve each year is still a bit of a mystery.

The House Martin on the other hand was added to the Red List in 2020 due to a rapid decline in the UK population but the reasons for this decline are still not fully known. No more than half a dozen birds were seen on the Reserve in the spring and summer months last year though there were some decent counts from late August to the middle of September as birds started to gather and move south, the best around 130 birds.

Swallows, fortunately, are still on the Green List though declines have been noted in the UK since around 2010. One pair again nested in the dumper truck shed and three juveniles were seen on the door of the shed towards the end of August. Numbers of birds were generally low but did start to increase in the second half of August and a count of around 60 on 13th September proved to be the highest of the year.

The Swift was added to the Red List in 2021 due to worsening declines in the UK breeding population. Numbers over the Reserve in recent years have certainly been very disappointing.



Lack of suitable nesting facilities has probably been a contributory factor and we had hoped that our nesting tower at the back of the Reedbed would provide good opportunities. By playing the calls of Swifts on two speakers on the tower it was hoped that birds might be more inclined to investigate. Sadly the nesting boxes came down in the February gales two years ago and heavy equipment would have been needed to get them back in place. While it is planned to put up a new set of boxes it is unlikely that this will be in time for this year's arrivals.

Outwitting the Woodpeckers



Just over a year ago an article appeared in the Newsletter headed "How to Deter Woodpeckers" with a photograph of a badly damaged nest box on the Willow Path. The culprit was a Great Spotted Woodpecker trying to get its head in the box to extract eggs or chicks. The nest box in question had a metal plate round the entrance hole designed to prevent this happening but the bird merely drilled in above the plate. Wire mesh has also been tried on all sides of nest boxes but the woodpecker still finds a way.



Nest boxes in one particular area of the Willow Path have been the worst affected and visitors will see that we now have a row of donated woodcrete boxes in place here. These are made from a blend of wood and concrete and were trialled last year. They proved popular with the birds and there was no woodpecker damage. But woodpeckers are clever birds so let us see what happens this year.



Harlequin Ladybirds



It is hard to believe this fast spreading invasive species only arrived in Britain in 2004 and took less than a decade to spread throughout the whole of the UK. Large numbers hibernate in some of the hides throughout the winter but a recent nest box check along the Willow Path in February also found scores in some of the nest boxes. Over 100 different patterns have been recorded.

Originating in eastern Russia, China and Japan it was probably brought to Britain as a natural pest control via Europe or USA where they were first introduced. It wasn't the best of ideas. It certainly preys on aphids but it is also partial to the eggs and larvae of our native ladybirds! In North America it is sometimes known as the Halloween Bug because it gathers in large numbers during the late autumn, sometimes invading people's homes.

Big Garden Birdwatch Weekend – 27th & 28th January

Once again, we celebrated The Big Garden Birdwatch at Rodley with support from Megan from The RSPB and many families.

We had a brilliant weekend with the sun shining instead of the horrible rain we'd had all winter. It was especially sunny in the Manager's Garden where visitors were watching and counting birds. We had several Guides in The Hide, who helped everyone identify the birds they saw and we had put up several more feeders which certainly made a difference.

Instead of disappearing like the birds always seem to do on BGBW weekend, there were more garden birds than we'd seen for a long time and they were visiting all the feeders eating different food. A Great Spotted Woodpecker, who came to his favourite spot for peanuts, looked around and saw our new peanut feeder and headed straight for it. On the way, he saw a block of fat cake so stopped to eat, giving everyone a good view.

We even had a Treecreeper visible for quite a while circling around the trunk of a large tree and our two resident Little Owls were showing themselves, much to the delight of many visitors. One sat out in a tree and one of our regular birders managed to put his scope on it, giving others a chance to see it. One little boy even refused to go home until he'd seen the little owl!

Lots of happy children then came inside to make bird feeders, which they took home to put in their own gardens and we welcomed many families who hadn't visited us before.



Thank you all for your support.

Denese Swann

RNR Events Coordinator

Recording your Sightings

In the first few months of this year the recorders have been hard at work writing their reports for the 2023 Annual Review. It can be a frustrating task because the number of observers taking the trouble to record their sightings in the books in the Visitor Centre seems to get less every year. This means that the reports based on these records do not necessarily give a true reflection of the status of the wildlife on the Reserve.

You might think that the bird or dragonfly that you saw while in one of the hides or at the ponds with other observers will be recorded by someone more experienced but this is frequently not the case. We would rather have duplicated records than no records at all.

So please do record your sightings in the Visitor Centre and a big thank you to those of you who already do this. We couldn't produce the Annual Review without you.

Build a Nest Box - Sunday 18th February



Once again, we celebrated National Nest Box Week by inviting families to come and build a nest box with the help of our volunteers. Our fabulous woodwork volunteers had pre-made nest box kits, so our local children could learn how to build a nest box and be given guidance where to place it when they took it home. It was a very noisy affair but all the children had a brilliant time and no fingers were lost!



I wanted to share this lovely message which we received from one family who came to build a box with us.

“I just wanted to say thank you all for such an amazing day today. Myself & my children came along to build a bird box as part of National Bird Box week and we had the best time! Your volunteers were really engaging and

encouraging when building the box. We were amazed at all their knowledge and information. We then came inside and enjoyed all the activities. From borrowing binoculars, finding the hide outs into the Manager's Garden, to having fun mixing the lard and making bird food. We all came away in awe of nature and excited for the birds to use their very own built bird box.

It's not very often you can spend a whole day somewhere keeping the kids entertained, but we feel that they were so occupied all day. We're excited to come pond dipping in the summer and bring our picnics looking out at the view. Many thanks, Claire “

Denese Swann

RNR Events Coordinator

Watch out for Weasels



Photograph by Peter Humphrey

Thanks to their small size and habit of sticking to cover Weasels are not often seen. Surprisingly, over the years the best place to see one has been on the road by the Visitor Centre. The above photograph was taken here in March and was one of several sightings this year. The UK's smallest carnivore, it preys on voles, mice and birds. However, due to its small size it can itself fall prey to larger creatures. Towards the end of 2022 there were two records on the Reserve of Weasels being predated by Grey Herons.

Team Work makes the Dream Work



This year the Events Team, RNR volunteers and Aireborough Rotary Club again worked hard to create a pleasurable day for local families. The Grand Easter Egg Hunt was a complete sell out with 1,100 tickets quickly snapped up. The weather was kind to us and the team jumped into action.

The team erecting and dismantling the gazebos ensured that everything was ready at both ends of the day including help being given to all the outside stallholders as they arrived. The carparking team worked miracles, hindered at times by the bridge opening and having to keep an eye on backed up traffic and the various parking options available to them. Thanks go to the Cricket Club and the William Merritt Centre for the loan of their carparks.



Soon there was a steady stream of eager families appearing down the

drive. Many of them were regulars encouraging their excited children to listen to the instructions. But it was a pleasure to welcome many first timers admitting they had never visited the reserve before.





Very quickly the stalls were thronged with visitors enjoying the amusements and there was a steady queue outside the café. The Visitor Centre both inside and out was kept busy and it was good to see the children drawing and colouring as well as being told about the birds such as our Kestrels.

But how do you measure success? The carpark team commented on the grateful thanks of families returning to their cars having had a wonderful day out and promising to come back next year. From a fundraising point of view, Aireborough Rotary collected around £1500 to support local charities. Our sister organization Aireborough Inner Wheel raised £380 from the Lollipop Tree and Prize Every Time jam jars. The Reserve received donations totalling £515 in the Visitor Centre and on the book stall in addition to the sales of stock (for birdseed, toys and gifts). All this will have left a dedicated band of volunteers tired but happy with the satisfaction of having achieved a job well done

Janet Kerr

Aireborough Rotary Club and
RNR Volunteer - Events team

Events May to July 2024
Check our website for event times

<p>SPRING BIRD WALK</p> 	<p>SUNDAY 5 MAY</p>	<p>A SPRING FAMILY WALK TO LEARN HOW TO IDENTIFY BIRDS BY THEIR SONG</p>	<p>MEET AT THE MAIN CAR PARK (NEAR THE RIVER)</p>
<p>MOTH TRAP OPENING</p> 	<p>SATURDAY 8 JUNE</p>	<p>JOIN OUR EXPERTS TO IDENTIFY THE MANY SPECIES OF MOTHS</p>	<p>MEET NEAR THE VISITOR CENTRE</p>
<p>NATURE QUEST DAY INCLUDING MOTH TRAP OPENING</p> 	<p>SATURDAY 20 JULY</p>	<p>A DAY FULL OF WILDLIFE ACTIVITIES FOR ALL THE FAMILY</p>	<p>VISITOR CENTRE AREA AND AROUND THE RESERVE</p>
<p>BAT NIGHT</p> 	<p>SATURDAY 27th JULY</p>	<p>A WALK AROUND THE RESERVE TO LOOK FOR BATS AND LISTEN TO THEM ON OUR BAT DETECTORS</p>	<p>MEET AT THE VISITOR CENTRE</p>

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

<p>For Rodley Nature Reserve Trust Matters: Trust Secretary: Peter Murphy Email: info@rodleynaturereserve.org</p> <p>Visitor Centre Volunteers Coordinator: Louise Staniland Email: lstaniland17@outlook.com</p> <p>Friends Membership: Christine Cooper Email: rnrwetlands@hotmail.com 78 Acres Hall Crescent, Pudsey, Leeds LS28 9DZ</p>	<p>Education Bookings: Sue Henderson Tel: 0113 2298919</p> <p>Newsletter: Peter Murphy</p> <p>Events Coordinator Denese Swann Email: events@rodleynaturereserve.org</p>
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