



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2024



Snipe in the snow

Photographed by Tony Collinson

News and Updates

We have made great efforts over the years to make the Reserve more user friendly for wheelchair users and other visitors with walking problems. It was hoped that improvements to the surface in the Blue Badge parking area would get underway earlier this year but for a number of reasons this did not prove possible. However, we are pleased to report that the work was completed in November.



Events

Our events organisers have had another busy and very successful year culminating with the Halloween Event on Sunday 27th October. This is always a popular one, not just for the children but for our volunteers too as it gives them the opportunity to dress up in some rather strange costumes! Fortunately, the weather was kind and the event was well supported. You can find a report and some photographs later in this Newsletter.

We already have two events planned for 2025 - the Big Garden Bird Watch Weekend on 26th and 27th January and the Nest Box Event on Sunday 16th February. You can find more details on our website.

Rodley Robins

Following three successful public fungus forays this autumn on Saturday 9th November fungi expert and trustee Andy Woodall led a foray for our children's club the Rodley Robins. This proved to be equally successful with a good range of species recorded.

Bioblitz

There are numerous definitions of the term Bioblitz but it is essentially an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible over a short period of time. When we were asked if a team of professional ecologists could do a Bioblitz on the Reserve in September as part of their Climate Resilience Week it was hard to say no. It proved to be a very successful day helped by some fine weather and you can read all about it in this Newsletter.

Barn Owls

Daytime sightings of Barn Owls hunting over the Reserve are few and far between but following another successful nesting year it is nice to be able to see a bird still in residence in the nest box in December. This, of course, is thanks to having a camera in the box and being able to relay live images back to a monitor in the Visitor Centre.

Calendars and Reviews

A big thank you to those of you who have purchased a copy of our 2025 Calendar. At the time of writing this we still have a small number available at a price of £6.50. We also still have a few copies of the 2023 Annual Review which members of the Friends are entitled to. Please ask one of the volunteers in the visitor centre if you would like a copy.

Swift Nesting Tower



We are pleased to report that work is now well under way on the Swift nesting tower and this should be operational in time for the arrival of the birds next spring. New blocks of boxes have been constructed with a roof overhang and it is hoped that this design might be more appealing to the Swifts than the old boxes were. These boxes came down in the autumn gales two years ago.



The theory is that by playing the calls of Swifts on two speakers on the tower the birds will be more inclined to investigate. Unfortunately It didn't work with the old boxes but perhaps the new design will make the difference.

Sadly the Swift was added to the Red List in 2021 due to worsening declines in UK breeding population.

Tufted Ducks



This is usually the time of year when duck numbers are at their highest on the Reserve. The Tufted Duck is a species that soon established itself when the Lagoon was created, hence it being used as the Reserve's logo.

The UK has quite a small breeding population of around 18,000 pairs but during the winter these are joined by over 100,000 birds from Iceland and Northern Europe.

It was a regular breeder here at Rodley in the early years of the Reserve and in winter numbers built up, reaching a record 122 in December 2010. Four or five pairs produced 30 young in 2009 but there was then no successful nesting in the next five years. One pair did produce 10 young in 2015 but there have been none in the last nine years.

With half the Lagoon frozen over a WeBS count of 20 birds on 22nd January proved to be the best in 2023, the next highest being just 10 on 12th March. This year at time of writing the best count was just 11 and in August just one bird was reported and that was on 30th.

Bioblitz

Climate resilience is defined as the ability to anticipate, prepare for and respond to hazardous events, trends or disturbance related to climate. Improving climate resilience involves assessing how climate change will create new or alter current, climate related risks and taking steps to better cope with these risks.

JBA are one of the world's leading environmental and engineering consultancies. As part of their Climate Resilience Week their Ecology Team took part in a Bioblitz at the Reserve on 17th September. The Reserve's volunteers supported the JBA Team in recording 351 different species of plants, fungi, birds, moths, aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates and more. It proved to be a beautiful clear, sunny day with just a gentle breeze.



The survey ran from 10am to 3pm in which participants recorded all species encountered. It adhered to the Natural History Museum Bioblitz guidance. The aim is to use a mixture of scientists, naturalists and members of the public to create a “snapshot” of the variety of life that can be found in an area.

A total of 48 species of birds were recorded including Common Buzzard, Kingfisher and Green Sandpiper. Three mammal species were identified. Small mammal traps set by volunteers the night before produced Field/ Woodmouse and a Weasel was also spotted.

As regards amphibians, Smooth Newts were recorded in the woodland areas and during pond dipping. A Common Frog was also found during pond dipping and a Common Toad was recorded on the River Path.



Photo by Pam Hunt

Other Bioblitz photos provided by JBA

Excluding dragonflies and damselflies 30 aquatic invertebrates were identified in the ponds including Water Stick Insects and a Water Scorpion, the latter always an exciting find. Greater Water Boatman and Lesser Water Boatman were the dominant species found.



Bioblitz (continued)



Experienced botanists together with an arboriculturist undertook a structured walk over the site recording all species of vascular plants and trees. A total of 42 tree species were recorded with 149 vascular plant species. A total of 22 Fungi species were also recorded during the event.



A Robinson trap set up on the Butterfly Bank the night before would normally produce a good range of moths at this time of year but temperatures plummeted overnight to a low of 4°C at 3am and only two Square Spot Rustics were caught. Five other species were recorded at various locations around the site. Butterflies responded rather better thanks to the sunshine and eight species were recorded.

Ringed Grey Wagtail



Photograph by John Cooper

Photographing ring numbers on the legs of Mute Swans is often possible and over the years we have been able to track down when and where some of these birds originated from. On a small bird like a Grey Wagtail it is a lot less easy.

However, on 8th March 2022 a bird seen at the side of the canal at Rodley was found to be ringed and photos of the leg ring were obtained. It turned out that this bird had been ringed as an “age nestling” at Balmuirfield, Dundee on 5th May 2021. In November this year a ringed Grey Wagtail photographed on the Reserve was found to be the same bird. These are partial migrants and in freezing conditions they may fly south as far as North Africa to find warmer conditions

Grey Wagtails can often be seen on the river from the riverside path when water levels are low. The Duck Marsh, farmland manure heap and Yorkshire Water compound can also be productive Holes and crevices in buildings and rocks are popular nesting sites and birds have certainly nested in stonework in the Yorkshire Water compound in the past. The UK population has fluctuated and the species is currently on the Amber List.

Halloween

Sunday October 27th



Tickets for pumpkins for this year's Halloween event went live at midday on Tuesday 1st October, and all 500 were taken up within 12 hours!! So popular is this event! To avoid disappointment, we decided to allow families to come without booking, to enjoy the Halloween Trail, Crafts and Games and other activities only. However, due to several no-shows, many children went home with a pumpkin after all.



The weather was perfect on the day, frosty first thing, then lovely warm sunshine for the rest of the day. This allowed everyone to have a fabulous time. It was lovely to see all our local children enter into the spirit of Halloween and come dressed in some wonderful costumes. Our volunteers also dressed up as witches, pumpkins and skeletons. Our team of carvers

were kept very busy patiently carving faces on 250 pumpkins which were kindly supplied by M&S Pudsey.



Our Halloween Trail was a popular attraction, with children jumping over broomsticks, searching in the leaves for bones, knocking over milk bottles, hooking up tiny pumpkins and spiders from our water tub, and finally enjoying a scary story told by our wonderful witches.



"Making a witch with a green face"

Others had their photograph taken by putting their faces through our Skeleton Board and had fun throwing soft balls at each other in the Stocks. Children tried their skills on our Crazy Golf and some even managed to get a hole-in-one through the pumpkin, witches' hat and ghost boards!

Thank you for all the lovely feedback you gave us during the day, and afterwards on social media. We really appreciate your lovely comments. It was lovely to once again see many families visiting us for the first time. At the end of the day everyone went home very happy but very tired!



I don't know about you but I always think pumpkin carving is going to be easy but then half way through give up on my idea and end up with some wonky face on the front (if at all).



So it was a treat today to have our pumpkin carved by the lovely team at Rodley Nature Reserve! The Halloween event there today was lovely and how many pumpkins they carved throughout the day I couldn't tell you (but it was a LOT!). I bet there's a few hands in need of a rest tonight. Thank you! 🍂

We hope you'll all come and join us for our next event which will be our Big Garden Birdwatch, supported by our friends at The RSPB. This will be on the weekend 25th and 26th January 2025. Details will appear on social media and our website in January.

Denese Swann

RNR Events Coordinator

Festival of Christmas Angels

Last year The Grove Methodist Church held a Wreath Festival to coincide with the switching on of the Horsforth Christmas lights. It was a wonderful success, so this year they decided to hold a Festival of Christmas Angels.

We received an invite to create an angel to celebrate Rodley Nature Reserve. The design could be anything from our imagination, small or large, freestanding or hanging. Our volunteers took up this exciting opportunity to celebrate Christmas.



Our Angel is made from willow, grown and coppiced at the reserve, woven together with ivy and decorated with pine cones collected locally. Paul, the husband of one of our volunteers, crafted the beautiful wooden RNR logo which is attached.

If you are unable to visit our angel at The Grove Methodist Church you can see her friend who will be on display in our visitor centre until the New Year.

Denese Swann

Some Events to Look Forward to in 2025

RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch — 25th and 26th January 11am—2pm

Build a Nest Box — Sunday 16th February 11am—2pm
Booking Required

Easter Egg Hunt — Easter Sunday April 20th
Details to follow

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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Website: www.rodleynaturereserve.org