



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023/2024



Photograph of Roe Deer in velvet by Peter Humphrey

Latest News

Welcome to the winter edition of our Friends Newsletter. If you were looking for a "White Christmas" you were probably disappointed with the rain, strong to gale force winds and unusually high temperatures that we had to endure over the holiday period.

These were the sort of conditions our habitat management volunteers have had to work in on Mondays and Fridays in recent weeks. But they still seem to enjoy it and keep coming back for more. We are grateful to them and indeed all our volunteers for their commitment. You can read why two of our habitat management team enjoy volunteering later in this Newsletter.

Also in this edition we have a short review of 2023 in numbers. This focuses on just some of the species that are doing well on the Reserve. However, not everything had a good year in 2023. A number of our species are really struggling and, as we keep being told, the United Kingdom is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

It is always a worrying time when we have to replace one of the larger nest boxes on the Reserve. It certainly worked when we put up a new Kestrel nest box two years ago but would it work when we had to replace the Little Owls' nest box in the Manager's Garden last month? Read the article in this Newsletter to find out more.

We will, of course, be running all our popular events again this year and dates for the first three of these are shown on the back page. See posters, social media and our website for more details.

The new bridge over the canal has not caused too many problems in recent weeks, less barge traffic at this time of

year no doubt helping. However, we have to remember that at some point we will have 18 months of noise and disturbance when work starts on the housing development on the Airedale Mills site next to the Reserve entrance. We are continuing to monitor the situation closely.

On a more positive note we now have a new website. If you haven't already looked at it please do and let us know what you think. We always welcome feedback. You can find it at

www.rodleynaturereserve.org

Finally a big thank you to all of you who bought a copy of our 2024 calendar and indeed to all members of the Friends of Rodley Nature Reserve for your continued support.

Avian Flu

While we have only had a small number of reports of dead birds on the Reserve in 2023 we need to be aware that Avian Flu has not gone away. Geese and seabirds have been badly affected and this is just the time of year when large numbers of geese and Black-headed Gulls are present on the neighbouring farmland and on our wetlands.

Being colonial nesters Black-headed Gulls have suffered particularly badly as the disease has been able to spread rapidly from bird to bird. Other species can also be affected so please continue to report any dead or distressed birds that you see during your visits to the Reserve in 2024 and under no circumstances should you attempt to handle them.

A Review of 2023

The Year in Numbers

99 The number of bird species recorded by visitors in 2023. Two new species were added to the Reserve list this year - Kittiwake and Black-crowned Night Heron - bringing the total number recorded to date to 185.



Photograph by Barbara Murphy

42 The number of sightings of Otters on the river and wetlands.



Photograph by Peter Humphrey

19 The highest number of Little Egrets ever recorded on the Reserve - 29th September.



Photograph by Peter Humphrey

11 The number of young Barn Owls that have fledged from the nest box on the Scrubland in its first three years 2021 -2023



Photograph by Peter Humphrey

8 The highest number of Common Buzzards ever recorded together on the Reserve - 6th February



Photograph by Peter Humphrey

5 The number of Kestrels that fledged from the nest box at the edge of John Ackroyd Meadow for the second year running.



Photograph by Barbara Murphy

Being a Habitat Management Volunteer



Photographs by Jane Stone

I've been a habitat management volunteer at Rodley Nature Reserve for almost seven years now and the time has absolutely flown by. Initially I came on vocational placement as part of my studies in Countryside Management with Askham Bryan College in York. Because of other commitments I was unable to complete the course but I was keen to keep on volunteering at Rodley.

I look forward to Fridays when I am at Rodley. The tasks we perform are varied and interesting and we usually work in small teams. A typical day on the Reserve might involve tree planting, clearing paths, hedge construction or working in the coppice. This not only contributes to the maintenance of the Reserve but also allows me to stay physically active and connected to nature. The positive impact on my mental health and well-being is a significant part of my volunteering. The outdoors, fresh air and the physical demands of the work all play a role in keeping me healthy.

I am privileged to work alongside a knowledgeable and dedicated team of individuals with a collective passion for nature who create a very positive and inspiring environment.

Here's to many more years of fulfilling and enjoyable Fridays at Rodley Nature Reserve!

Caroline Kitson

I began volunteering at Rodley in the summer of 2018. It was a great opportunity to be able to do something to help to improve biodiversity while maintaining and improving access for the public.

Since I started volunteering at Rodley I have been part of a team who has demolished and rebuilt dead hedges, sown wildflower seeds, planted plug plants, dead headed hogweed, bashed balsam, coppiced and planted trees, created and cleared paths, maintained ponds, woven shelters, built bug hotels, pruned bushes and, I nearly forgot, raked. All this is done alongside a fantastic group of enthusiastic people and surrounded by wildlife.



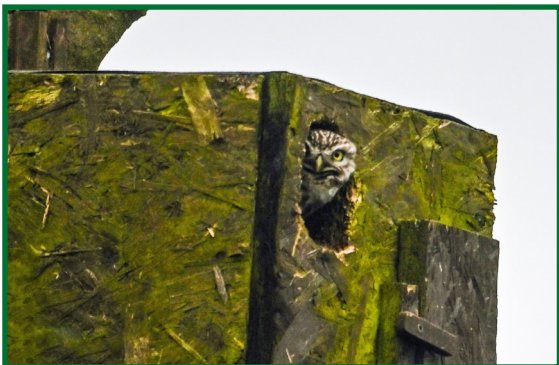
Despite being an avid birder and nature lover for as long as I can remember, I still learn something new every day I'm there, sometimes about the wildlife and plants, sometimes about habitat maintenance. I feel healthier and happier by being outside and in good company, while enhancing the varied habitats.

Jane Stone

Little Owls



The Manager's Garden has provided some excellent opportunities for both seeing and photographing Little Owls in recent years thanks to the birds habit of sitting out in the open. A pair has used the nest box in a tree at the back of the garden for a number of years but proving nesting success has been less easy without disturbing the birds. We know the box was used successfully in 2019 with two young fledging but the outcome in the following three years was unknown with no actual sightings of young reported.



In 2023 birds were seen going into the nest box on several occasions but there were again no definite sightings of juveniles and Grey Squirrels on and around the box on occasions was not a good sign. By now the box was showing its age with a number of holes appearing and the decision was taken to replace it with a new one. The new

box was constructed by our volunteers and erected last month on the same day that the old one was taken down. It was hoped that the birds would take to their new box and we would have some definite breeding success to report at the end of 2024. Only a few days later the following photograph was taken showing a bird peering out of its new home having just ejected a Grey Squirrel!



The Manager's Garden is not the only place where you might spot a Little Owl here. The ends of the gutters on the small building in the Yorkshire Water compound have produced numerous sightings and this building is best viewed from the path to the Manager's Garden. The dry stone wall and trees at the back of the farmland close to the Manager's Garden can also be productive on occasions.

We tend to forget that the Little Owl is not a native species, having been introduced to Great Britain from the Continent in the 1870s. Sadly, populations are in decline both here and elsewhere in Europe so it is good to know that we still have a pair here on the Reserve.

Little Owl photos by

Peter Humphrey

A Rodley Robins Year

Our Robins have had a very busy year in 2023 starting with counting birds for The Big Garden Birdwatch in January; then dissecting owl pellets in February to see what the Barn Owls had been eating over the winter. In April we were able to get into our wildlife area to give it some much needed TLC. We cut the grass; weeded the raised beds before painting them; cleaned all our bird feeders to prevent disease and tidied up our willow tunnel and solitary bee hotel. Everything looked very smart when we had finished and we were ready for our buns and orange juice!



We spent the summer learning how to look after honey bees, under the guidance of our resident beekeepers, Peter and Paul. We learnt how to set up a hive and watched the honey bees at work. Over the summer we saw our hive grow in numbers until there were thousands of bees living in it and watched as they visited flowers and collected pollen.

Did you know that bees make about two to three times more honey each year than they need to survive the winter, so it is ok for us to eat it too! A single honeybee will only create about 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey in its entire life. That's not even enough to sweeten a cup of tea!

In Autumn we decided that our bug hotel, which we built in 2016, needed replacing. A company called Colas Ltd, who had been working on the reconstruction of the Horsforth Ring Road, kindly donated some pallets for us to construct a new one. We demolished our old hotel before carefully transferring all the existing material (and all the inhabitants) into their new home. We kept adding to our tower block until we ran out of pallets, then put all the material we had collected into it.



We think our new bug hotel is very smart, and hope that all the creatures will enjoy living there. It is now known as 'CASA DEL BUG'.



In October Peter removed the honey from the honeycombs in our bee hive and turned it into liquid. We got to do the best bit, which was to bottle the honey and stick on our own unique, designer labels. The result was jars of beautiful, sticky, golden honey which, when we licked our fingers, tasted scrumptious!!

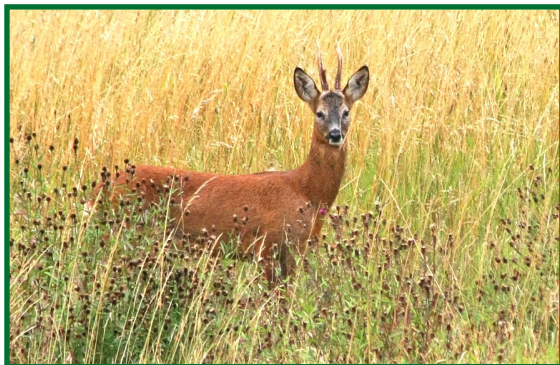
A Rodley Robins Year (continued)

To end our busy year, we made festive candles out of beeswax. Beeswax isn't honey, but it's the result of bees eating honey. Beeswax is relatively solid, but it's easy to mould and shape when it's warm. Using coloured beeswax sheets, we carefully fastened the wax around the wicks, cut out shapes of a different colour using small cookie cutters, and then rolled the wax into beautiful candles that we wrapped up to give as Christmas presents.

We've had a very exciting year, learning lots of new things about the world around us and we can't wait to see what exciting adventures we are going to have in 2024!

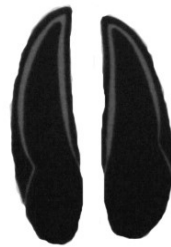
Denese Swann, Rodley Robins Leader

Roe Deer on the Reserve



The photograph on the front cover of this Newsletter is a lovely example of a Roe Deer with its antlers in velvet. Antlers are a pair of bony growths that are shed each year. After this a new set of antlers grows. While they are growing the antlers are covered with a heavily blood-filled hairy skin called velvet. When the new antlers are fully grown the velvet comes off easily when the deer rubs and "frays" its antlers against a tree.

Red and Fallow Deer fray their velvet in late summer to early autumn but our Roe Deer do it in spring. You will often find examples of deer damage caused by this on the trunks and overhanging branches of small trees around the Reserve. There are sightings in every month of the year and while you might not always see a Roe Deer when you visit the Reserve they are never far away and signs of their presence are not hard to find.



Their hoof prints, known as slots, are very distinctive and can often be spotted in damp sand or mud. A good place to look at this time of year is on what is known as the Winter Walk, ie. the path along the bottom edge of Tim's Field.



Being surrounded by the river on three sides and open farmland on the other one might wonder how deer can easily come onto the Reserve. They are in fact good swimmers as the photograph above shows.

Roe Deer photos by

Barbara Murphy

Some Events to Look Forward to in 2024

RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch - 27th and 28th January 11.00am - 2.00pm

Build a Nest Box - 18th February 11.00am - 2.00pm (Booking required)

Easter Egg Hunt - Easter Sunday 31st March - Details to follow

See posters, social media and our website for further details.

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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Peter Murphy

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Website: www.rodleynaturereserve.org