



Registered Charity No. 1070744

**FRIENDS OF
RODLEY
NATURE RESERVE
NEWSLETTER
Summer 2026**



Garden Warbler

Photograph by Christian Rawson

Mystery of the disappearing bee colonies

The Rodley Robins Club met at Rodley Nature Reserve on the 9th May for their annual beekeeping activity - only to find all the bees had disappeared.

The Reserve has successfully kept three active hives since the early 2000's and as well as introducing children to beekeeping, has supplied honey for the Visitor Centre shop, so it was a complete shock to find all the hives completely empty.

The Reserve had approximately 60,000 bees across the three hives but there was no sign of any alive or dead, no eggs, no larvae and no honey - all gone.

Resident beekeeper and member of Calverley Beekeepers, Paul Lawrence, said: "It is something known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) which has been causing widespread colony losses and threatening the sustainability of beekeeping and our food supply. It's a phenomenon where entire colonies of bees disappear or die off suddenly."

CCD has been linked to various factors such as pesticides, climate change and varroa mites and Paul added: "I don't think pesticides have played a part as it's not used on the Reserve and I've taken swabs to test for the varroa and there are no signs of mite. Apparently, CCD is a complex issue and there appears to be no known reason."

Robins Club leader Denese Swann said: "There were some very disappointed young children

on Saturday but we asked them to come up with their own theories as to what might have happened. They came up with several interesting suggestions that lightened the gloom - "they got bored and flew away; they were eaten by birds or rats or hornets; they've gone on holiday and taken all the honey; they were abducted by aliens; they were eaten by bears; a bear like Winnie The Pooh ate all the honey."

Paul and his fellow bee enthusiast Peter Hoskins, together with the Reserve, are already in the process of purchasing five new bee colonies which should be delivered and introduced shortly.

Peter, who has managed and supported beekeeping at Rodley for many years, said: "It's a pleasure to be involved at Rodley and to see as many children as possible learning about bees. What the Reserve delivers via the education team and the Robins Club is wonderful".



David Nesham

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

If you ever visit the reserve early on a Sunday morning, twelve times a year you may spot a group of hardy volunteers (come rain or shine) carefully recording every bird (particularly waterbirds) that they see or hear.

Why are they doing this? They are participating in an important national survey known as WeBS!

So, what exactly is WeBS?

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the UK's scheme for monitoring birds that use wetlands, coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). It dates back to 1947, when the first national wildfowl counts were organised in response to concern about declining populations and increasing pressure on wetlands.

Over the years the survey evolved and by the early 1990s WeBS in its current form was born, providing a single, coordinated approach across inland waters, estuaries and coastal sites.

We started doing WeBS here in 1999 and have been doing them every month since, apart from a few missed surveys during the pandemic. We now do a survey of all the birds that we encounter around the reserve, not just waterbirds.

The most recent WeBS at Rodley was on Sunday 17 May. A group of six of us set off from the Visitor Centre at 7am on a fixed route around the Reserve.



Photograph by Christian Rawson

Here are some highlights:

First a Swallow and a Swift up high, then Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Blackcap in the Coppice.

As we neared the Lagoon a smile was put on our faces by the explosive song of a Cetti's Warbler.

A flash of blue as a Kingfisher flew past, Little Grebe and Coots constantly diving under and reappearing, making the count a challenge.

Six Little Egrets feeding elegantly on the Wet Grassland, first recorded here during a WeBS in August 2016 but now relatively commonplace.

The result of the three- or so-hour survey was 54 species seen and heard. An excellent morning's work!

Pragna Unia & Simon Brown

International Dawn Chorus Day

Sunday 5th May

This event is celebrated on the first Sunday in May and began in the 1980's. The dawn chorus is one of nature's most precious gifts. Make the effort to hear it, and you'll be walking on air for the rest of the day!

What is the Dawn Chorus? From early Spring to Summer, as day breaks, songbirds live up to their name and fill the air with music. It's the males who sing the longest and loudest, for two reasons: to defend their territory and to attract a mate.

Why do birds sing at dawn? Birds sing at dawn because it's quiet. Singing at dawn is thought to be 20 times more effective than singing at midday when there is more background noise. The fuss dies down when it's light enough to find some breakfast.



Photograph by Mandy Haxby

How do birds sing? Birds have a syrinx which works like our vocal cords. What's special about it is that some birds, such as the song thrush, can sing more than one note at a time.

Do all birds sing? Some species of birds, like gulls, do not have songs, but most have something to sing about. It is the passerines (the songbirds) who are the star singers of the dawn chorus.



Photograph by Mandy Haxby

Why do birds sing in the Spring? As Spring approaches, the longer days activate a chemical change in the brains of male birds. They realise it's time to start breeding and so the dawn chorus begins.

Do some birds sing earlier than others? Some birds do start singing very early in the morning. Robins, song thrushes and blackbirds are always among the first to strike up.

The changing dawn chorus. Noise and light pollution are changing the dawn chorus. In some places, robins can be heard singing through the night, which may be due to light from streetlamps confusing them as to when dawn breaks.

Thank you to those of you who braved the rain to spend the morning with us to listen to the beautiful bird song and learn who was singing. We hope you enjoyed the experience.

Denese Swann

Easter Egg Hunt - 5th April

Nearly 1000 of you joined us on Easter Sunday for our annual egg hunt. Thanks to your generous donations, Aireborough Rotary Club raised over £1100 for local charities.

Unfortunately, Storm Dave brought a spell of disruptive weather to the north of England on 4th & 5th April, notable for a combination of very strong winds, heavy rainfall and even hailstones! Despite the weather, the volunteers put out baskets of brightly coloured eggs around the reserve and arranged the chocolate eggs for the tombola.



Children gathered at the starting point, clutching egg boxes, their eyes scanning the hedgerows and winding paths with barely contained excitement. Our Easter Egg Hunt had begun!

They scattered like a flock of birds — some racing toward the trees, others carefully inspecting beneath benches and behind rocks. Laughter echoed through the reserve as discoveries were made. "I found one!" a boy shouted, holding up a shiny blue egg he'd found in a basket.

Nearby, two children crouched beside a fallen log, whispering as though the eggs might hear

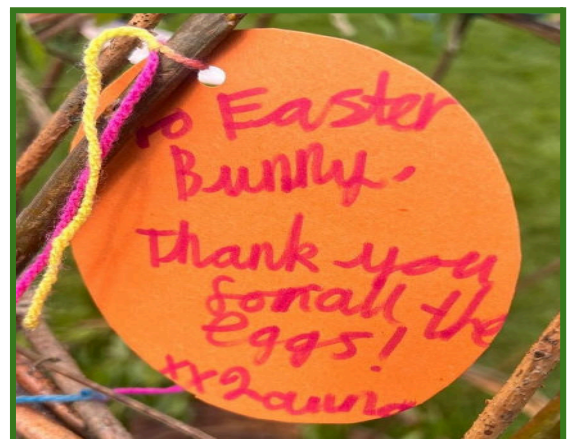
them. When they found the next basket, they both squealed, then dissolved into giggles. Along the trail, parents followed more slowly, huddled up against the weather. The reserve seemed alive in every direction — children having fun, and the distant murmur of the river flowing nearby.

At the heart of the Easter Egg Hunt stood a bright, hand-painted sign that read: "Tombola Lucky Dip - Pick a Number, Win a Treat!" Beside it sat a large wicker basket filled with tightly folded slips of paper, each one hiding a mystery.

Children gathered quickly. "Step right up," called the volunteers with a grin, holding out the basket. "No peeking—just a lucky dip!" One by one, small hands reached in, fingers brushing against the paper slips as if trying to feel the lucky one. Children squeezed their eyes shut before choosing.

Some numbers won, some didn't —but every prize brought excitement. Even the tiniest chocolate egg felt like treasure when it came from the mystery of the lucky dip.

As people began to leave, children with chocolate around their mouths, looked back over their shoulders, as if the reserve might still be hiding one last egg just for them. And perhaps, in a way, it was — the memory of an exciting spring day, full of small wonders, waiting to be discovered again next year.



Denese Swann

Moths New to the Reserve 2026

Increased moth trapping this year has resulted in the identification of three species not previously recorded on the reserve: -



Grey Shoulder-Knot Moth



Engrailed Moth



Red Sword-Grass Moth

RSPB Bird Feeding Guidance - Feed Seasonally. Feed Safely

In April, the RSPB updated their guidance on what and when to feed our garden birds to reduce the spread of disease.

A brief summary of the advice is :-

Feed Seasonally - during summer and autumn, there's a higher risk of disease spreading, but it's also when there are more natural foods available to birds.

1 May to 31 October

Pause filling your bird feeders with seeds or peanuts but offer small amounts of mealworms, fat balls or suet.

1 November to 30 April

Feed your birds a full range of bird foods, including seeds and peanuts.

Feed Safely - busy bird feeders can become hotspots for disease so it's vital to keep things clean.

You will notice that we at Rodley are following this advice.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/how-to-help-garden-birds>

Ring-necked Parakeets



Though it is not native to the UK the Ring-necked or Rose-ringed Parakeet is now so numerous here that it is regarded as a common British bird. It has a long history as a cage bird and many thousands were imported from India and Africa until at least the mid 1960s. It now has an almost worldwide distribution.

However, these parakeets are expert escapologists and the earliest record of breeding in the wild here was in Norfolk as far back as 1855. Winter roost sizes can total many thousands of birds.

Sightings on the Reserve are becoming much more frequent these days and it is now well established locally. They are undoubtedly a beautiful bird but they are seen as a pest species as they compete with both native birds and bats for nesting or roosting cavities in trees.

Annual Review

As reported in the last Newsletter we will not be producing a printed Annual Review for 2025 but the individual wildlife reports will appear on our website. We had hoped these would be available in time for this Newsletter but unfortunately that is not the case. However, we do hope to have them available for viewing very shortly.

Planting for Bees



If you are passing the Wet Grassland Hide in the coming weeks you cannot fail to see the fine show of Dame's Violet or Sweet Rocket (*Hesperis Matronalis*) this year. It comes in lilac, purple or white and is very fragrant, particularly so during the evening.

Introduced from Europe centuries ago it is relatively short-lived but self-seeds freely. It is also very popular with bees.



Photographs by Barbara Murphy

Another plant to be found here at the same place is Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) which was just starting to flower at the time of writing. This is another excellent bee plant. Its common name comes from a time in the distant past when it was used as a cure for snake bite. This one is only a biennial but again it does self-seed freely.

Peter Murphy

Rodley Nature Reserve Events 2026

SUPERVISED POND DIPPING		Restarts Sunday 24th May	Come and see what creatures live in our ponds	Public Dipping Ponds
NATURE QUEST DAY		Saturday 1st August	A day full of wildlife activities for all the family	Visitor centre area and around the reserve
FUNGUS FORAY		Sunday 18th October	Learn about the fungi at Rodley	Visitor centre area and around the reserve
HALLOWEEN		Sunday 25th October	Come in fancy dress and enjoy some Halloween fun	Visitor centre area and around the reserve

Remember to check our website for Moth Trap Opening and Bat Night dates which will take place later in the year : <https://rodleynaturereserve.org/events/>

Reserve Opening Times

Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday and most Bank Holidays: March to October – 9am to 5pm
November to February – 9am to 4pm

The Visitor Centre is open March to October 10am until 4pm, November to February 10am until 3.30pm during Reserve opening hours.

Members of the public are only able to visit the Reserve on the above days/times

Telephone No. on open days 0113 2040441

For Rodley Nature Reserve Trust Matters:

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