



Registered Charity No. 1070744

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



Female Clouded Yellow (Helice)

Photograph by Penny Smith

Pond Dipping

The beginning of Autumn brings about the end of our very popular summer pond dipping sessions at the reserve. Sessions ran on Sunday afternoons from the end of May and were joined by Wednesday afternoons during the school summer holidays.



So, what is pond dipping? Contrary to what some people think we don't actually put children in the water! In fact, we are quite proud to say that so far no one has fallen into the ponds under our supervision.

Pond dipping is about exploring the wonderful world of creatures that live below the surface of our purpose-built freshwater ponds. We use nets to carefully collect samples and put them into shallow trays of water to look at them more easily. They are then returned unharmed into the pond they came from.

Safety around water is of course our top priority which is why every family that comes to take part is taken through a quick demonstration on how to kneel down while using the dipping nets and how to use the equipment properly. This is done by our dedicated team of volunteers who are crucial to the success of this activity.

As well as providing instruction on how to dip safely, they are also able to help visitors identify the wildlife and tell them about their lifecycles and other interesting facts. We all learn from each other. Kai started volunteering with us this year and said, "it feels like a little community within the volunteer team, but also the visitors as well.

My favourite part about pond dipping is that it can be so different from one week to the next- it is always worth doing again!". Paula added, "I have loved every minute, meeting all the lovely helpful volunteers who have made me feel so welcome, the excited children and their families, and of course learning about the creatures in our ponds...who knew there is a pond scorpion!".

It is great to see so many new families coming to enjoy the Reserve as well as some that like to come almost every week. Ethan and Joshua say they like finding different species of creatures and looking on the chart to see what they have caught.



Favourite catches include dragonfly and damselfly larvae, newt tadpoles (aka efts, not axolotls as the children call them!), great diving beetles and their larvae, three spined sticklebacks and yes, water scorpions!!

Rachel Gander

A Wonderful Day Exploring Nature

This year we had no yellow weather warnings for torrential rain to spoil our fun. Instead, we were in the middle of one of the hottest, driest summers on record.

Children had a fantastic day getting up close to nature during our special Nature Quest Day. There was lots to see, discover and learn as we explored the fascinating wildlife around us.

Children enjoyed discovering bugs and insects and building homes for them, spotting birds and learning more about the important role they play in our environment. They were also fascinated by beautiful dragonflies and butterflies, taking time to observe their colours, shapes and movements.

A real highlight was pond dipping! Children enjoyed carefully dipping their nets into the ponds and discovering the fascinating creatures living beneath the surface. We found lots of interesting pond life and enjoyed looking closely at our discoveries before returning them safely to their habitat.



Another highlight was exploring owl pellets. Children were amazed to discover what owls eat and enjoyed carefully investigating the pellets to see what clues they could find. Such enthusiasm for dissecting owl pellets was a joy to behold. Conversations were 'interesting' "I've found a skull", "I think this is a jaw", amidst shouts as our committed palaeontologists got stuck in. Also, a lot of adults now know that owl pellets are not poo!



We also learnt about moths and discovered that, although they are often confused with butterflies, moths have many interesting features of their own.

It was wonderful to see the children's curiosity and enthusiasm throughout the day. They asked lots of questions, shared their discoveries and developed a greater appreciation for the amazing wildlife around us.

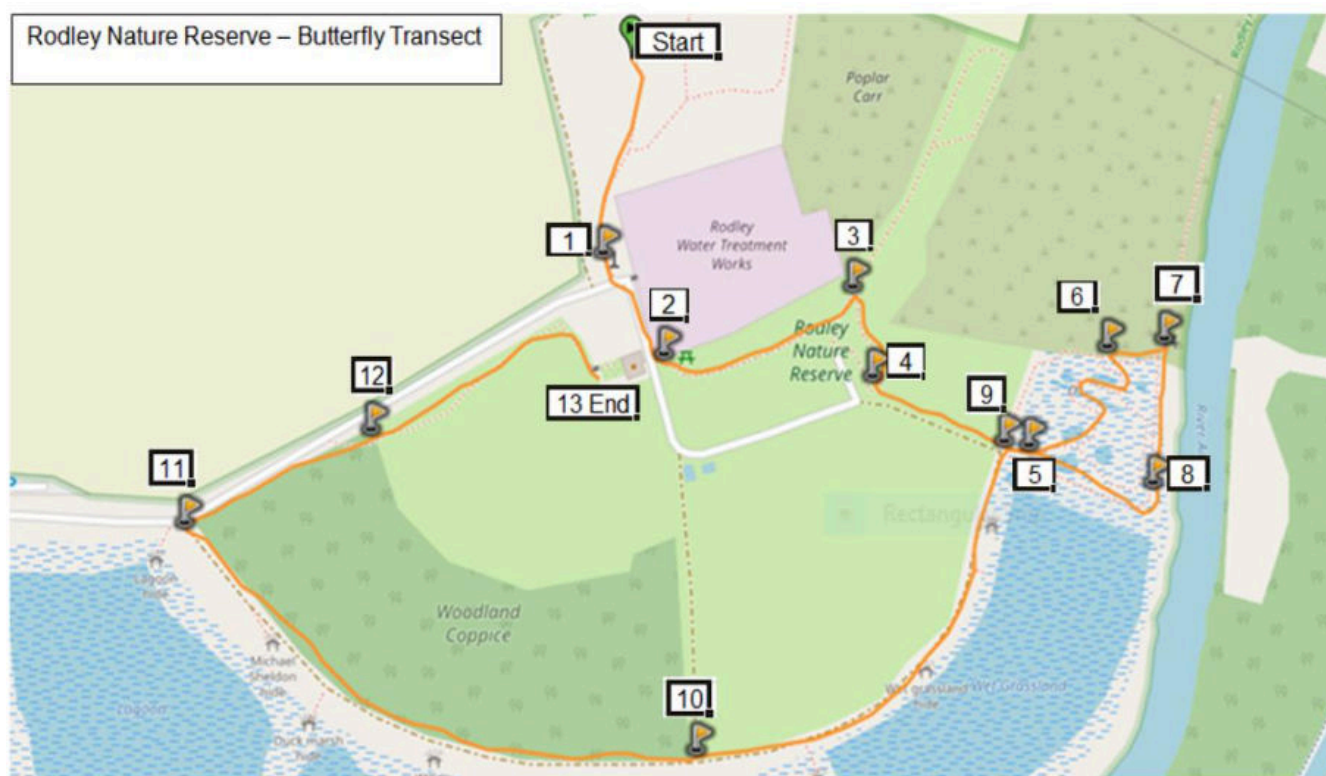
What a wonderful day of learning, exploring and enjoying nature!

Denese Swann

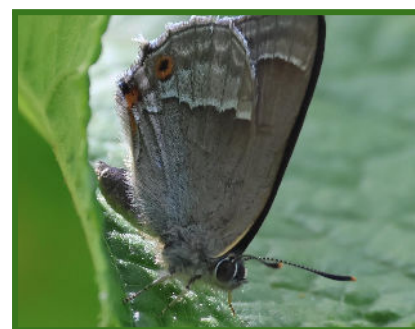
A remarkable afternoon with the Butterflies of RNR

Within the butterfly season Wednesdays are, weather permitting, a Rodley Transect Day for Penny and I. Butterfly Transects were introduced by the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme in 1976. They co-ordinate and collate the data from, what is now, approximately 3000 walks undertaken by volunteers across the country. Each walk is pre-defined, broken down into separate habitat sections, and repeated weekly from 1 April to 30 September every year. This provides an enormous database of information to allow the scientists to analyse abundance trends with regard to butterfly species development.

In 2021 we defined the Rodley Nature Reserve Butterfly Transect and are now in our sixth year, with Pragna Unia expertly covering for us when we are away. The requirement is that we walk continuously at ca 2km/hr along the walk, recording section by section the butterflies we see in an imaginary box 2.5m to either side of us and 5m in front. Our walk commences at the Managers Garden Hide and meanders round the site through to the Bee Garden by the Visitor Centre, a total of 13 sections.



On 15 July 2026 we arrived to perfect weather and it was immediately obvious we were going to enjoy an excellent day. As we set off numbers were much higher than normal with Gatekeepers everywhere. The first highlight was in section 5 when a Purple Hairstreak was spotted on the first oak tree. This was a first for our transect. There are probably many Purple Hairstreaks in the RNR oaks but they tend to be most visible in the evening when the site is closed, hence our delight at seeing one.



Purple Hairstreak
(image not taken at RNR)

As we continued Tim's Field was awash with Small Whites of which 39 flew through the count box.



Section 11 revealed the next treat, when, sitting on the Knapweed was a Silver Washed Fritillary. These are strong flying butterflies that have colonies but singletons do seem to fly away to explore. The nearest colony we are familiar with is Bishop Wood near Selby. Another first for our Transect.

Silver Washed Fritillary (Not taken at RNR)

The walk continued, the numbers of species grew, and finally we were finished. Prior to today the record count for a transect was 186 (16 July 2025) with 12 species. Today we counted 279 with 18 species.

Brimstone	2	Meadow Brown	42	Silver Washed Fritillary	1
Comma	1	Painted Lady	2	Small Copper	1
Gatekeeper	96	Peacock	7	Small Skipper	3
Green-veined White	2	Purple Hairstreak	1	Small Tortoiseshell	1
Holly Blue	1	Red Admiral	12	Small White	87
Large White	6	Ringlet	9	Speckled Wood	5

However, the best was still to come - In 2026 we have been walking the new loop in the John Ackroyd Meadow weekly so we can get a base level idea of the butterflies to be found. This will allow us to make an impact assessment, should the proposed S-bend Butterfly Bank be built there, by comparing the numbers before and after. Whilst walking the loop Penny stopped to take a photo of a Large White on a distant purple Knapweed. But it did not look quite right. Closer inspection revealed a Clouded Yellow, but not any Clouded Yellow - a pale form Helice female Clouded Yellow. These are rare - only the second one we have ever seen anywhere. Clouded Yellows are migrants; they fly in from the Continent and in many years very few arrive this far north. Though now and again (as in 2025) we get large numbers usually in August. So, to get a Helice Clouded Yellow, which comprises between 5 and 20% of Clouded Yellow females, at RNR was a treat indeed. It posed for photos for over 30 minutes and the front page of this newsletter carries the image that Penny captured before it flew off towards the river to continue its journey.

An afternoon that will live long in the memory.

Howard Smith

Tophill Low Nature Reserve

Earlier in the year the Reserve had an unexpected invitation to attend the annual Open Day being organised by our sister Yorkshire Water nature reserve at Tophill Low, near Drifffield, on 14 June. The last couple of years have seen a closer working relationship established with the Yorkshire Water Ranger staff based there and it seemed a good opportunity to repay some of the significant contributions the Ranger team has made, and will be continuing to make, here at Rodley.



So, thanks to Dylan and Max for driving, 5 of us duly arrived at this truly impressive wetland nature reserve and indigenous plant nursery, equipped with RNR photo display boards, RNR merchandise, and of course sticky boards and owl pellet dissection kit to entertain visiting children. The weather was lovely, the staff helpful, and Tophill Low's resident European Marsh Frog population provided a musical accompaniment to the free cake we were treated to. We talked to many of the 650 people who came to the Open Day, several of whom were Leeds residents pleased to see their city's nature conservationists represented.

It was great to talk to the other organisations with a stall there, including Waterlife Recovery Trust - the mink management project that is starting in East Yorkshire and from which we will benefit eventually - the Canal and River Trust and the local bat conservation group. And of course we came away with a great selection of native plants. We recommend a visit.

Maggie Bellwood

Redevelopment Of The Reedbed And Wet Grassland Habitats

Following the success of the Duck Marsh redevelopment in March 2021 further improvement work is now planned for both the Reedbed and Wet Grassland habitats.

The proposed redevelopment is designed to both improve habitat diversity for wetland species by reforming the layout and water depths together with easier maintenance requirements. It will also include for the overdue tree maintenance to the distressed willows along the Willow Path which currently provide "predator perches".

The work will be carried out during the Autumn months and, unavoidably, will cause disruption to both habitats and visitor access along the Willow Path.

Once established, the initiative will provide a more attractive habitat for our wetland species and an improved visitor experience together with an easier maintenance programme.

Trustees would like to acknowledge the technical assistance and funding provided by Yorkshire Water in progressing the redevelopment.

Rodley Robins 10th Anniversary Celebration

This Summer Rodley Robins Children's Club celebrated 10 fabulous years! In advance, we asked our ex-robins for their memories of their time with us and here are Sam's memories which I think epitomises everything we set out to achieve.



"I have so many fond memories from my time at the club, especially the days we spent building bird boxes, bug hotels and other little shelters for wildlife. There was something special about working together outdoors, chatting, laughing and getting muddy along the way. Seeing birds in the nest boxes we'd made or spotting insects exploring the habitats always felt incredibly rewarding. More than anything, I loved the sense of community and the peaceful moments surrounded by nature whilst doing something that genuinely made a difference.

I think the club has had a big influence on what I enjoy and value today. Spending so much time outdoors and creating things for

wildlife made me appreciate nature in a much deeper, more hands-on way. It taught me to slow down, notice the small details, and enjoy being outside rather than always rushing around.

I've also carried forward the sense of purpose that comes from doing something practical and meaningful, and I still value teamwork, creativity and caring for the environment because of those experiences. I feel I took away a much deeper appreciation for nature and the impact small actions can have on wildlife.

The club taught me practical skills - from building habitats to understanding how different species live - but it also gave me confidence, teamwork experience and a sense of pride in contributing to something meaningful.

Most of all I left with a stronger connection to the outdoors and a lasting motivation to keep supporting and protecting the natural world."



Sam Westerman

Fledged Rodley Robin

Wildlife Recorders Wanted

We will be looking for recorders for Mammals, Butterflies and Amphibians from 1st January next year. If you are interested in one of these positions, or know someone who might be, please email us at info@rodleynaturereserve.org and we can provide details of exactly what the roles involve.

The 2025 Recorders' Reports are now available on our website under the heading *Get Involved*.

Rodley Nature Reserve Events 2026

Check our website for details of our Fungus Forays on 18th October and our Halloween event on 25th October : <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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Website: www.rodleynaturereserve.org