



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Summer 2008 no 67

Through The Chair

Opt – imism

Or – choosing to be more cheerful. Difficult, I know, with the average weather forecast this July. But in spite of Stannington Carnival being cold and often damp, the RVCG stall was its usual busy self. Lots of positive feedback regarding all the work our volunteers do. We can revel at looking back at last year's achievements but also plans for our next project.

Planning matters always get mentioned and here we can also look forward. The future is brighter – with the change in Council make-up we expect to be involved in more discussion before decisions are made rather than afterwards. Derek and I have actually met with local members and officers here in the valley.

If you are feeling under the weather, have a trip down to Rivelin Mill Pond. It's impossible not to be optimistic looking at what you have helped to re-create down there. The lovely, inspiring view from the car park is now being shared by pupils from local schools taken there on field trips with talks from local conservationists in the outdoor classroom we built.

If you open your eyes to the world around, there is always something to smile about. Our patio paving needs pointing. No chance! Those cracks this year have been taken over by a host of ox-eye daisies. The view from the back door is no longer distorted slabs – it's a sea of bright shining daisy heads. They just knew we'd never turf them out. That wasn't just opportunism = that's optimism.

Roger and Out

Don't forget – our Open Meetings start Tuesday 9th September 7.30pm

Have you renewed Membership? A few of you haven't. Please send your £3 to M Sanderson 35 Den Bank Cresc S10 5PB with cheques made payable to RVCG. Thank you.

Contacts

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Donations

So far this year donations with membership have reached £500. Thanks to France, Hall, Jones, King, Moulson, Parker, Roe, Shaw, Walker, Ward, Warrender, Wildgust. All funds will be used towards our projects

Garden Party Fundraising

Wendy and Mike Maas opened up their garden to raise money for RVCG. The bring and buy sale, cream teas and plant sale brought in more than £300 to aid our funds. We were all entranced by the garden itself with wonderful views across the valley and an ideal setting for this event. We send our thanks to Wendy and Mike for all their time and effort to raise this amount and for sharing their garden with us.

M Sanderson

In the Garden

I recently took part in a Community Service Volunteer with BBC Radio Sheffield in a Springwatch project to educate children about the environment and wildlife through play and hands-on experience. The site was an unused allotment in Mexborough. It was a very happy occasion with several societies coming together, including the allotment society and local schools. Everyone worked hard (the children were especially enthusiastic) to transform the plot into an area for children to learn about gardening and nature.

Allotments are ideal breathing spaces for people and wildlife. We are very lucky to have some allotments on the sunny slopes of the Rivelin Valley. They are a haven for wildlife, which filters up into the neighbouring gardens. For me, even though it can be hard work, gardening is a relaxation. You can forget the worry and stress of everyday life and commune with nature. Just sit quietly for 5 – 10 minutes and you will be amazed at other activities going on around you, and the beauty of all creatures. Have you ever looked at a slug closely? Some of them are quite beautiful. I expect you think I have gone quite mad now, but take a look at the Great Grey Slug (*Limax Maximus*), with brown grey stripes on its back and spots on the head area. I was lucky enough to see a pair mating. Slugs are hermaphrodite (each has male and female organs so both lay eggs). One slug followed the trail of the other one round my compost bin. They became entwined and suspended from a shiny rope of mucus (a bit like a spider hanging from a thread of web). They mated (I will not go into detail – unlike Bill Oddie) in a most elaborate fashion. They were entwined for over 1 hour and then went their separate ways. Not all slugs are bad for the garden. This one eats fungi and rotting material as does the Large Black Slug (*Arion ater*) which can vary in colour from black, to brown, orange or creamy white. The small slugs are the gardener's enemy, so be careful which ones you get rid of, or of course encourage hedgehogs into your garden – they prefer the small cream slugs

Joan Buckland

Views of the Valley (1)

I like being in Rivelin because we play cricket and football on Carver Fields. I like whacking the ball very far. I like hunting for badger trails, climbing rocks and trees. My Daddy sometimes picks up rubbish. I feel cross when people do it and would make them pick it up. Once we went to the Hallam Chase and it was amazing. I do not know how they do it because the ground is very rough so it must be hard work. The runners start at the pub on Sandygate Road and they run all the way down to Rivelin and all the way up to Stannington Church. Then they have to run all the way back. One day I would like to run in the Hallam Chase.

Guess how many people know about the secret rock carvings on Den Bank Edge? There are lions, a skull and a sword. You can't see them from the path. You have to scramble down the edge.

James age 9

Views of the Valley (2)

I am going to be honest with you. I am not the sort of person who likes walking but walking in Rivelin is different because there is so much to do. Things that I like doing in Rivelin are exploring, climbing trees and looking at nature. I love adventuring through the heather and bilberry bushes and climbing on rocks. I love doing sports like football, cricket and gymnastics on the field near my grandma's house. If I asked some of my friends if they like the countryside, they would probably say "No", but I disagree with them. There are plenty of things to do. I would encourage people to walk, as we are lucky to have such beautiful scenery because in some parts of Sheffield there is no countryside at all.

Chloe age 11

Some Recent Events

Potteric Carr Nature Reserve 20th April

This is an extensive site run by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, well set out and with a variety of habitats, probably the nearest we will know to bird heaven. It was a cold day but the café was a suitable refuge. The walks are mainly flat, punctuated by hides with ramp access. As well as birds, a rat made several appearances stealing nuts meant for the birds and Roger managed to see a stoat catching a rabbit! It was also an artist's dream with the endless reflections and subtle colourings of reeds, water and reflections.

Contact for reserve 01302 570077

Evening Walk 20th May

Fourteen walkers set off from the Three Merry Lads for a walk in the upper reaches of the valley. The 14th walker had four legs which, fortunately prevented me from reporting that we were a party of thirteen. We set off down the steep ravine of Fox Hagg, a nature reserve which shows off the amazing panorama of the whole valley and beyond to power stations on the misty horizon beyond Barnsley.

Nearer home across the valley, Rivelin Rocks peeped through the trees. This grit stone edge contains the Rivelin Needle – you can't see it from the A57, but it is popular with Sheffield University climbers. It remained unclimbed until the 1930's when the first ascent was by Eric Byne and friends.

The underground reservoir at Rivelin built in the 1990's has now merged with the landscape and the once unsightly tip at Lawns Farm is now a green field. Standing alone on the Stannington horizon is a clump of trees sheltering the Bowcroft Burial Ground. This dates from the early 18th c when Quakers were regarded as heretics and because they refused to pay their tithes and accept the ministrations of the established church, they were not allowed burial in the parish churchyard. One of the gravestones is of George Shaw who 'suffered much for bearing his testimony against the payment of tithes'. This walk took us through bilberries, heather and woodland and apart from a couple of joggers, we had it all to ourselves. All this was rather idyllic until we

reached the Lodge Lane car park (which also has magnificent views), regarded by some of our population as a rubbish dump. This is a convenient place to pull up, eat your takeaway, toss out your rubbish and drive away in a clean, tidy car. Fortunately our walk continued up the hillside and ended, of course in the Three Merry Lads. Thanks to Roger for arranging walk.

Visit to Wentworth Castle Gardens

This garden provided us with a wonderful day out which was very much enhanced by Fred, our guide. He was once a gardener here and knows just about every leaf and stone here and has a detailed knowledge of the rhododendrons and azaleas for which these gardens are known. Some of these were very ancient and towered above us and some had fallen down but still alive, looking like some modern sculpture with their twisted trunks. We passed a Corinthian style mini temple, where the ladies of the house could gossip and admire the view while they sipped their tea. Today this view contains the M1. A house of this period had to have a ha-ha, a hidden ditch that kept out the cattle while allowing the garden to merge with the countryside without impediment. The house dates back to the early 1700's built by Thomas Wentworth and is now a college. He is said to have built it to alleviate his disappointment at not inheriting Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham. Thereafter he called his distant relations 'The vermin over the hill'.

All along the route, Fred kept us amused with stories of his working life on the estate, all told in his wonderful Yorkshire accent. He also has a ghostly tale of an enormous boulder that would take many men to move, but mysteriously appeared on a wagon while they were all on their lunch break.

Wentworth Castle is open year round except Christmas Day and the disabled can hire a two-person buggy. For more information phone 01226776040 or

www.wentworthcastle.org

Thanks to Janet for arranging this and Potteric Carr.

M Sanderson

Reports

Mary Brazil 07-02-08

Saw a dipper for the first time this year at Hind Wheel and first celandine at Glen Bridge.

Anonymous 22-04-08

Tofts Lane is a muddy mess outside Oak Farm as there are too many horses. The covenant on this farm is only for 4-6 own horses. This is now a livery stable and it's a mess.

Keith Kendall 22-04-08

Darwin Lane Crosspool

Two Owls midair fighting right in front of our car, we stopped and as they flew off one landed on the tree right at the side of the road giving us a great view of it for a good 2 mins.

Keith Kendall 27-04-08

Den Bank Crescent

A goldfinch in the tree in my front garden which is the first time for 15 years.

Keith Kendall Fri 25-04-08

Den Bank Crescent

Being forced to get up at 4.30am to go swimming, brought home the beauty of the Dawn Chorus. It was the best I have ever heard. Fantastic.

Ken Shale 28-04-08 was very pleased to report that a new family of moorhens has been seen on Rivelin Mill pond.

Joan Buckland 02-06-08

Den Bank Close. Tawny Owl seen on telegraph pole. Also magpie eating newts out of garden pond on Marsh Lane.

Claudia Hall – 14-06-08 at about 2pm - we saw 5 whimbrel feeding in the fields to the east of the reservoirs at Redmires - the ones just to the south of the conifer plantation on the main road up to Wyming Brook. I commented that the whimbrel looks so similar to a Curlew I don't think I could tell the difference except for their call. Claudia replied: We thought they seemed smaller and also the beaks were less long in proportion to their bodies ...

we've seen quite a few curlew recently and these were different!

Rev, Michael Wildgust 17-06-08

On Tuesday 12:15pm flying about 100ft above the Peacock pub car park, Stannington, was a red kite, on a SW to NE track and being mobbed by three crows. Weather cloudy but bright with excellent visibility.

Derek Hastings

7/7/08 Rivelin Mill pond

I saw a speckled wood butterfly at the western end of the grassed area located between the two water areas

Members of the committee reported the following:

May – Roger Kite: Pipistrelle and noctule bats flying around houses on Den Bank Close. Pond skaters and sticklebacks on Rivelin Mill pond following two pond dipping events involving Stephen Hill Beavers and Lydgate Lane School. Grouse and curlews seen at Redmires

June - Skylark / curlew / coaltit and cotton grass seen along the Conduit at Redmires, Roger Kite : blue tits nesting next door

Margaret Sanderson was pleased to report sparrows nesting in her garden. Margaret also reported a tortoiseshell and small cabbage white butterflies in her garden and coal tits nesting in a stone wall next to her garden steps but they don't mind people walking past. In spring she cut up a ball of bright yellow angora wool and hung it on a tree thinking that the birds might use it. She never saw it disappear but recently bright yellow chunks of angora wool attached to dried grass and bird feathers have been falling from the guttering where house sparrows are nesting.

Kit Couldwell – Den Bank Crescent

Early July – "a little animal walked across my lawn whilst I was sitting out 2 or 3 weeks ago. It was sleek and shiny, nice tail but not bushy like a squirrel, with a small head and was quite composed. Not hunting or hunted. It also had a beautiful rich hue; the colour of a ripe 'conker'".



Could be the Sphinx hairless cat. Origin Canada. Said to be kept by the ancient Aztecs. Should be kept indoors.

Margaret says "this could be a hairless cat – one lives in the area. Its not entirely hairless – they do have short hairs". Mr & Mrs Couldwell have also seen a 2ft yellow and orange snake in their garden recently. Perhaps someone's escaped pet Corn Snake?

More bad news for bees.....

There have been more reports in the news recently on the demise of the bee. The dramatic loss in hive populations is extremely worrying. Sadly Western Park museum has lost its own bee colony.

The dramatic climate change we seem to be experiencing over the last two years has also taken its toll on midsummer butterfly populations. Subsequently this has also affected certain bird populations, which feed on the butterflies. Recent reports of Orange Tips and Speckled Wood Butterflies are more encouraging.

It's not too long ago when the buddleia in my garden was teeming in red admirals and peacock butterflies. I don't think I have seen one this year! I was walking my dog, Megs through the lower Carver field on Sunday 10th August and I did see a peacock butterfly and several commas.

Hi Graham,

Having moved to the Rivelin Valley almost two years ago, it has been fascinating to note the changes in bird life here since I was brought up in Stannington in the sixties and seventies. Sadly it's mostly bad news. I've written the attached article documenting what my observations seem to show.

Changes in the Birds of the Rivelin Valley – have we really lost so many species?

This year I've been surveying the birds of the Rivelin Valley as a contribution to the Atlas of British Birds organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. It has been particularly enlightening to compare what I'm finding now with what was found in previous surveys 20 and 30 years ago. In all these surveys the valley was split into 3 sections, which I'll call Upper, Middle and Lower. The Middle section covers the stretch from Holme Head Wheel (the overgrown one below the s-bend with all the iron stains in the water) to Wolf Wheel (the big pond below Rails Road, with lots of overhanging willows). Each section also includes areas north and south of the valley including Lodge Moor, Sandygate and Walkley but in reality the survey work will have been done mostly in the best birding spots ie in the valley itself. The surveys are done by carrying out counts of all the birds seen in each section in one hour in May. There is some attempt to add in other species seen in the area outside of that time but there's a chance that some species do get missed. I'd therefore be very interested to hear from anyone who has recently seen these 'missing birds'. The last survey was done during 1988-1990, about 20 years ago. Since then, it looks like we have lost:

Cuckoo (previously in Upper and Middle),
Tree Pipit (previously in Upper),
Wood Warbler (previously several pairs in both Upper and Middle),
Spotted Flycatcher (previously in Upper),
Willow Tit (previously in Upper and Middle)
Redpoll (previously in Middle)

These are all species that have declined massively throughout Britain. As the survey

was only for a short period of time, it is possible that they have been missed but I think it is likely that all these species really have gone from the valley in the last 20 years. Please let me know if I'm wrong and they're still here!

In addition, the following species are now much rarer here:

Willow Warbler – they used to be abundant throughout the valley; there are still plenty in Upper but none in Lower and only maybe 3 pairs in Middle

Linnet – seems to have gone from Lower and Middle.

Yellowhammer – I know of only 2 sites for singing males; there used to be many more

As if that's bad enough, the picture gets worse when we look back a further 10 years to the results of another survey during 1975-80 when the following species were also in the valley (U, M and L signify which sections they were found in):

Grey Partridge (U M L)

Snipe (U M)

Green Woodpecker (U M L)

Skylark (U M L)

Tree Pipit (M L as well as U)

Meadow Pipit (U M L)

Yellow Wagtail (U)

Redstart (U M L)

Grasshopper Warbler (U M)

Lesser Whitethroat (U M)

Spotted Flycatcher (M L as well as U)

Tree Sparrow (U M L)

Redpoll (U M L)

Reed Bunting (U)

Birdwatching in the valley was so much more productive then!

It's possible that this is an unfair comparison because the seventies survey was much more exhaustive, with an unlimited amount of time given to finding as many species as possible (and the area was blessed with a number of eager young birdwatchers who missed nothing!). So, are any of these species still here? Am I missing birds such as Green Woodpecker, Partridge, Tree Sparrow and Spotted Flycatcher because I'm not spending as much time on the surveys as they did in the seventies or have these birds really gone? If you have any recent sightings of any of these species in the Rivelin Valley,

please get in touch (dave@birdguides.com).

Meanwhile I should point out that it's not all bad news. In the last 20 years we've gained a few species too such as Canada Goose and Pied Flycatcher, other birds such as Pheasant, Nuthatch, Long-tailed Tit, Goldfinch and Chiffchaff are definitely more numerous and the Whitethroat, which disappeared from all three sections between the seventies and the eighties, has at least returned to the Upper valley.

Dave Gosney, Low Road, Sheffield

The RVCG chairman, Roger Kite, talks to children at Rivelin Mill....



The RVCG chairman helped to run one of the days during King Edwards School 'Summer School' week. After a talk at our new 'outdoor classroom', the youngsters took it in turns to explore the old mill sites down the nature trail and carry out river and pond sampling using the RVCG group equipment.



A £25m project aims to reverse the 76% decline in UK butterfly species

Natural history broadcaster Sir David Attenborough has launched a new £25m conservation project aimed at reversing the loss of 'healthy' land that has been described as the "silent natural disaster" that is threatening butterfly species in the UK.

Sir David joined founders, trustees and naturalists to unveil the plans for Butterfly World, a visitor attraction that will also act as a conservation vehicle to fund research and community project to save endangered butterfly species.

The initiative comes after figures in a report last year showed that 76% of British butterfly species are declining at a rapid rate. Six of these species have lost more than 50% of their distribution, the report, from the charity Butterfly Conservation, found. A further 15% have suffered distribution decreases of more than 30%, including formerly widespread butterflies such as the dingy skipper, small pearl-bordered fritillary, wall and grayling.

The report, *The State of Britain's Butterflies*, measured butterfly populations since the 1970s. It found that five UK species have become extinct. The 54 remaining species were found to be declining faster than birds or plants. Britain's most rapidly declining butterfly, the high brown fritillary, is now only found in isolated colonies in Devon, Lancashire, and just a few colonies in Wales.

The species most threatened are those that have special requirements about where they live. Of the butterflies that need specific habitats such as woodland clearings, heaths, or chalk downland, 93% are in decline.

The marsh fritillary and heath fritillary have the greatest long-term population declines, and there are worrying 10-year trends for the silver-studded blue, and the duke of Burgundy, researchers found.

David Attenborough said: "More than three quarters of British butterfly species have declined in the past 20 years - some of them very rapidly.

"That is worrying, not least because these declines indicate an underlying deterioration of the environment as a whole. For the sake of future generations we must take action now.

"Butterfly World is doing just that. It is putting the issues on the agenda and is seeking to help reverse this environmental catastrophe."

Butterfly World, planned on a 26-acre site off the M25 near St Albans in Hertfordshire, will be the world's biggest "walk-through butterfly experience", the organisers have said, with more than 10,000 tropical butterflies in flight at any one time.

Article: [Jessica Aldred](#) and agencies [guardian.co.uk](#), Thursday March 13 2008 11:54 GMT

There are a further 20 centres around Britain supporting the survival of the British butterfly. The butterfly is quite a tough character, lays a lot of eggs and a couple of warm dry summers will probably see it spring back in numbers given half the chance. It also has a very complicated relationship with other plants and insects. Therefore its not necessarily the butterfly itself that is directly being affected but the spoiling of the associated insect and plant environment could be to blame. The initiative is working with farmers and land owners to create 'healthy' land that will support a plethora of natural plants and insects.

We are interested in any sightings of butterflies. Please send your reports to grahamappleby@btopenworld.com or return one of the wildlife report forms or send your report through the RVCG website www.rivelinvalley.org.uk selecting 'recorder'.

Graham Appleby
RVCG Group Recorder