

Spring 2024 no 128

Welcome to the Spring Newsletter. We hope to see some of you out and about over the next few months. We will have a stall at Crosspool Street Market, Stannington Carnival and Walkley Heritage events as mentioned in the enclosed programme. The City of Rivers Exhibition at Weston Park Museum is well worth at least one visit and is on until November.

AGM and Social 2024



Photo: Mark Bateman

The AGM took place on 11th April at Stephen Hill Methodist Church. Roger Kite opened the meeting, noting that we still have no chairperson and would like more members to get involved with the work of the committee. Graham Appleby reported on Task Team, Joan Buckland on wildlife, Sue Shaw on links with other groups and the website and Jacqueline Diaz Nieto talked about the work of River Rangers. Mark Bateman asked members to forward any photographs of Rivelin to put on the website. Christine Roe presented the 2023 accounts, which were approved by the meeting. We are very pleased to welcome Ciaran McInerney who has volunteered to be our Speaker Organiser.

Contacts

Chair	VACANCY
Treasurer	Christine Roe
Secretary	Jacqueline Diaz-Nieto
Membership	Graham Roe
Task Team	Graham Appleby
Newsletter	C & G Roe
Group Recorder	Joan Buckland
Website	Greg Shaw
Speaker Organiser	Ciaran McInerney
Conservation Advisor	Roger Kite

If you wish to contact us please email

rivelin.valley@gmail.com

or visit the website

www.rivelinvalley.org.uk

We then moved on to the social part of the evening, with 'bring and share' snacks and cakes – thank you everyone! Roger provided a fiendish quiz about the Rivelin Valley and another about birds. There was also a picture quiz provided by Christine. Once the chocolate prizes had been handed out, Graham gave a review of 2023 with pictures of Task Team at work and the damage inflicted by Storm Babet. Graham then played the Rivelin Song to finish a very enjoyable evening.

Christine Roe

Membership

Many thanks to the majority of members who have now renewed their membership for 2024. If you are one of those who have not yet renewed there will be a reminder with this Newsletter. The simplest payment method is via our website at <http://rivelinvalley.org.uk/join.php>. (If any details have changed since last year, please tell me at rvcg.members@btinternet.com.) Cost remains the same at £3 per household.

If you have any queries about your membership, or whether you have paid for this year, you can email me at rvcg.members@btinternet.com.

Graham Roe, Membership Officer

**Could you join the Committee or even be the Chair of the Group?
Please get in touch.**

Task Team

February Task Day

The February task day was postponed until the 3rd March, when under the auspices of Ranger Ryan, 20 volunteers made some repairs to the severely storm damaged footpaths around Hind Wheel.



Pathway resurfaced at Hind Wheel bridge



A family help restore the bridleway down to Hind Wheel



Roger Cose creating a diversion for flood water at the Hagg Lane car park at the start of the bridle way down to Hind Wheel.

Footpath restoration is seriously hard work, but the task team volunteers appear to relish the challenge and really throw themselves into the fray. More footpath restoration is planned in the hope that such a devastating storm is unlikely to reoccur in the near future. Many footpaths are damaged by floodwater running off Rivelin Valley Road and so the Council has been asked to keep on top of drain clearance and the task team will help create water diversions away from the main footpaths.

March Task Day

The March task day was held on 24th March, a week early due to the Easter weekend. We took a break from the footpath restoration and concentrated our efforts on the dipping platform at Rivelin Cornmill where the rotting timbers had become a public hazard.



Ranger Ryan managed a small team to replace rotting timbers and to make the platform safe for another year.



Task team volunteers replacing rotting timbers at Rivelin Corn Mill dipping platform

The remainder of the volunteers were engaged in helping restore the adjacent willow tunnel. Created around 2007, the tunnel is still an attractive and a well-used addition to the Valley but requires regular maintenance to keep it trim. Willow is well known for rooting quickly but we are really struggling to get it to grow in that location. One suggestion is that there is too much shade from the surrounding trees.



Passing walkers stop to talk to the task team

The top growth is removed and planted and tied into the existing structure. Willow is deciduous but the dormant branches still create an inviting tunnel.



The willow tunnel at Rivelin Corn Mill provides an inviting structure for the adventurous.

Further work is needed to fully restore the willow tunnel



A few remaining volunteers adorn the willow tunnel at the end of a long rewarding task day



Graham Axelby removing graffiti from the waste bin at Rails Road car park

Text & photos by Graham Appleby

Open Meeting February 2024

The Open Meeting scheduled for February had to be abandoned because of heavy snowfall. Graham Appleby's talk 'The Fascinating Lives of Bees and Wasps' will be rescheduled at a future date.

Open Meeting March 2024

Melanie Fitzgerald gave us a well-attended talk on 'Packhorse Routes in the Rivelin Area'. She had started work on a Heritage Lottery Project to raise awareness of old footpaths and historical routes and this turned into a book supported by the Sheffield Landscape Lakeland Project. The book, entitled 'An Introduction to Packhorse Routes in the Sheffield Lakelands Area' was available for sale at the end of the talk.

Packhorses were used to transport goods from medieval times in steep hilly areas and are still used in the Himalayas. Salt, butter, cheese, and leather came across from Cheshire as well as tobacco, spices, and wine from foreign lands via Liverpool. Goods such as coal and tools were sent in return. There were well used routes across the moors for a pack train travelling up to 30 miles a day, with each horse carrying up to 17 stone. Loading and unloading required labour and then a couple of men to run the 'train'. Welsh and Galloway ponies were hardy and not too big for loading. The leading horse or 'racker' knew the way and had bells to deter thieving. Mules were used at times.

Melanie talked about packhorse bridges, markers and guide stoops and standing stones which can still be seen today, as well as causeways and hollow ways. Crosses gave thanks for a safe journey. Bridges had low sides so as not to impede the panniers and have since been built up for walkers. Racker Way ran from Walkley to Stanington over Hollins Bridge and then across the moors to Hayfield, carrying tools to Liverpool and the USA. Other routes went to other places such as Deepcar, Oughtibridge and Halifax.



Hollins Bridge

Melanie's talk was illustrated by many photographs and video clips of pack trains in the Himalayas today, showing topography not too dissimilar to the Peak District! It was a fascinating evening with a very knowledgeable speaker.

Christine Roe

Carver Fields

Members may recall that The Group was instrumental in helping to maintain this land after the former Sports Club was wound up in 1998. We had a management agreement with the new owners, Sheffield West Methodist Circuit to carry out improvements to public access and to develop the site for local community and church events, both organised and informal, and to enhance the wildlife habitats. This continued until the Church reorganised into one large city-wide Sheffield Circuit. This body declined to let anyone have approved access to the land and so the fields and footpaths have fallen into decline. They are still popular with the local community and from further afield providing a welcome passive open space with access to one of the best edge views in the city.



Our little spinney planted up in 2000

A meeting was held at Stephen Hill Church on 10th April when a representative of the Church invited users of the fields to discuss the various uses, present and proposed as to how the fields can be seen as a viable part of the Church's mission.

All the comments from the meeting are being taken back for the Leadership Team of the Church to discuss how the management can be taken forward and we look forward to their response. We hope RVCG may still have some part to play in balancing access and organised events with the delicate wildlife interests (both flora and fauna)

Roger Kite, RVCG Wildlife and Environment
Consultant

Wyming Brook now open

The planned works to remove larch trees affected by the fungal disease *Phytophthora ramorum* were further complicated by storm damage during the winter, much of which required remediation to make the area safe for visitors before reopening. This meant that Wyming Brook Nature Reserve was closed over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, but re-opened from Saturday 13th April.

Beaver feasibility study

A £100,000 pilot project to discover where best to reintroduce wild beavers in Sheffield has been approved. The Eurasian beaver, once hunted to extinction in the UK, could play a role in reducing the risk of flooding through natural flood-risk management – the dams they build could help slow the water coming down from upland areas. We heard previously that the Rivelin catchment was found not to be suitable, but apparently Blacka Moor and the surrounding Upper Don Catchment are the likeliest places for beavers to be reintroduced. The project is funded by a Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Capital Grant and by Yorkshire Water.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-68288709>

Plans to champion Sheffield's heritage set out

In 2021, the Joined Up Sheffield Heritage Strategy was launched by grass roots heritage organisations across the city, supported by the University of Sheffield. In February 2024, the Council's Strategy and Resources Policy Committee – the senior committee that includes the chairs of the other policy committees and has responsibility for cross-cutting issues such as heritage – formally adopted the Strategy and added it to their work programme. The committee also accepted the recommendation to explore how to fund and create a Heritage Officer role at the Council. This would give an officer within the Council advocating for heritage and helping their colleagues to recognise how their work impacts and benefits from heritage. They could lead actions within the Heritage Strategy such as improving educational use of heritage, finding evidence for health and wellbeing benefits and marketing the city's heritage better.

The full Council resolution on the Heritage Strategy last year and the work preparing it for the committee has already supported several positive changes:

- Resources and funding for the Local Heritage List and proposals for greater protection.
- Planning Dept is hoping to engage second Conservation Officer.
- Funding to update Conservation Area appraisals.

South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

We should soon be seeing more publicity about the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – one of a new, England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. They were introduced into law by the Environment Act 2021. The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority will lead the strategy development following DEFRA guidance.

It is hoped that the new strategies will act as a powerful new tool to help public, private, and voluntary sectors work better together for nature's recovery, enabling effort to be focussed where it will have most benefit. Each LNRS will identify areas that will either create or improve habitat that will have the greatest benefit to the environment. SYMCA will work with a wide range of stakeholders to agree the priorities for nature recovery in the region. This will involve drawing upon evidence to map the most valuable existing areas for nature and developing proposals. The published strategy will include a local habitat map and a written statement of biodiversity priorities.

DEFRA anticipate the strategy development will take 12–18 months and that all LNRSs will be published by March 2025. Following that, strategies will be refreshed between 3–10 years.

The Council is encouraging people to get involved – look out for upcoming Stakeholder Engagement workshops (soon to be announced and happening across the region over the Spring/Early summer). There will be in person and online options.

https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/explore_local-nature-recovery-strategy

Recognition of well-known people, places, or events in the Rivelin Valley

Is there anywhere within the Rivelin Valley associated with a well-known person, place or event that you think deserves wider recognition? You are probably familiar with Historic England's blue plaque scheme (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/blue->

[plaque-scheme/](#)) that celebrates people throughout history who have made significant and positive contributions to human welfare or happiness, but in fact anyone can put up a plaque marking a historic site. It would need the permission of the owner of any building or structure to which it is attached, and if it is a listed building, would need Listed Building Consent. Apart from that, all that is needed is funding. One example, as reported previously in this Newsletter, is the plaque put up at Ruskin House on Bole Hill Road in Walkley by The Guild of St George to mark the location of St George's Museum, which was founded in 1875 by the Victorian philanthropist and philosopher, John Ruskin.

(www.joinedupheritagesheffield.org.uk/peopleslist/ruskin-house/).

Another example, in the City Centre, is a plaque put up to honour the Blitz victims of the Marples Hotel, Fitzalan Square.

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/68643830/plaque-to-honour-marples-victims>

Ken Hawley Collection Trust

To celebrate 200 years of excellence in cutlery making in Sheffield since the original creation of the Joseph Rodgers Year Knife in 1821, a series of short films showcasing pen and pocket knife making was commissioned by the Ken Hawley Collection Trust. These can be found in their YouTube collection, along with many other fascinating films about Sheffield metalwork industries, particularly relating to the large range of cutlery and other tools that have been, and continue to be made in the city:

<https://www.youtube.com/@KenHawleyCollectionTrust/videos>

I was particularly interested to see a film made at the Burdon and Ball La Plata works, which sits beside the River Loxley on the one-way system at Malin Bridge and I'm sure is a familiar landmark to many RVCG members. The film was made in 1993 and shows the production of sheep shears, one of the high-quality garden tools for which Burdon and Ball is still well known, available in many a garden centre. The company has recently moved from La Plata works to a modern industrial estate near Parkwood Springs.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ktd_gHLp_mow

To find out more about the Hawley Collection visit their website:

<https://www.hawleytoolcollection.com>.

Sue Shaw

All hail the Invertebrates – Article from *The Guardian*, 13 April

We are prone to obsessing over ourselves and over animals like us. But most of the life on Earth is not like us at all. Barely 5% of all known living creatures are animals with backbones. The rest – at least 1.3 million species, and many more still to be discovered – are spineless.

All hail the invertebrates, animals of wondrous diversity, unique niches and innovative and interesting ways of making a living on this planet. They include insects (at least a million), arachnids, snails, crustaceans, corals, jellyfish, sponges and echinoderms.

And yet, despite their numerical advantage, originality and dazzling charisma, invertebrates are overlooked in favour of animals that more closely resemble ourselves or, more precisely, a human baby: big, slow-moving species with two soulful eyes; species with whom we can empathise or anthropomorphise. We lavish money on saving a polar bear stranded upon a melting glacier or a giant panda isolated in a fragmented forest because we feel their pain. Meanwhile, we're not even sure if nematode worms feel pain.

A tiny elite of invertebrates is on our radar because they are visible in our daily lives – red admiral butterflies, say, or giant house spiders or honeybees – but the vast majority live beyond our ken, untouched by human acclaim or scientific study. These animals certainly don't need our applause; mostly they simply need to be left alone. Unfortunately, the Anthropocene does not leave any species alone; many living things are being decimated without us even realising. The sixth great extinction is under way, and we are its architects.

Patrick Barkham



Red Admiral butterfly

THE RECORDER SPRING 2024

On 8th February we had about 7cm snow which covered the early cherry blossom on the tree at Stephen Hill Church. A week later and the temperature was back in double figures, and it has been up and down like a yoyo since. The Spring flowers on the grass verges, once again, looked beautiful, brightening up the area and reminding us that better weather was around the corner. Well, it's a long time coming. We could all benefit from a period of warm, sunny weather to ease the aches and pains and enable us to get out into the garden. Yesterday (6th April) was promising with warm sunshine most of the day but Storm Kathleen brought very strong gusty wind. The Peak District around Derwent was extremely busy, and I hope no-one got blown off Stanage Edge or Mam Tor.

The first phase of Spring is coming to an end and the daffodils and Forsythia are fading and being replaced by late cherry blossom and Magnolia. Many gardens in the area have got *Pieris Forest Flame* which has been spectacular this year. It flourishes in our acid soils. If you risk going down the Rivelin, you will be rewarded by the sight, smell and sound of the woods awakening. Birds are pairing up and building nests. There are more bees around making the most of the catkins, Celandines, Wood Anemones, and Golden Saxifrage.



Wood anemones

The dawn chorus is getting livelier. I feel sorry for the poor little birds singing their hearts out in the pouring rain. Chiffchaff were heard singing on the 15th March. By the time of Roger Kite's walk on the 8th May (meet at Rails Road car park 7pm), things should be in full swing, and the weather, surely, will be better by then and the muddy paths will have dried out.

Swifts will be arriving in May. If they are lucky, they will find the same nesting site to rear their young. Tragically many arrive to find their nesting cavities destroyed. They prefer old

buildings with crevices in walls, under roof eaves or under pantiles. Sadly, many of these old buildings have now been modernised and all holes blocked up. Imagine travelling thousands of miles from Africa only to find your perfect home is no longer available. If they cannot find an alternative, there will be no young born that year. New houses are usually too well sealed to accommodate them. Swifts are now on the red list of Britain's most endangered birds, but there is hope. There are several local Swift groups set up to encourage people to put up swift nest boxes on their houses. If you would like more information is available on the Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust website <http://wildsheffield.com/swifts>.



Common swift

As well as a lack of nesting sites, there are also fewer insects as prey. If we all grew more insect friendly flowers and stopped using garden chemicals, that would make a big difference to many birds. Try to make your garden as wildlife friendly as possible with something in flower in every season. If you have not got a pond, a small container, not in full sun, will attract more creatures. A wood pile in a corner is ideal for many creepy-crawlies. Encourage children to be inquisitive and not frightened about the natural world. The younger they start the better.

Frogspawn appeared in my pond on the 15th March which was two weeks earlier than last year, and March had record warm temperatures throughout the world. Many creatures are influenced by temperature, and this will affect the balance of nature. I have, again, put some frogspawn in containers and some have begun to develop into tiny tadpoles. Even though it has been warmer, it has been wetter and windier, and the Magnolias are still being battered by Storm Kathleen today (9th April). The weather has also affected our moth count, and we have only recorded two moths for the whole of March. These were the Common

Quaker and the Brindled Pug, so I hope the bats sleep a little longer.

The highlight of this year so far was the appearance of Siskins in my garden. I first saw five on the sunflower feeders on the 10th February and there have been two or three pairs every day since. There was an influx of 20+ onto the feeders and surrounding trees on the 2nd March but they only stayed a few minutes.



Male Siskin

They are small yellow and black streaked finches with a body weight less than half that of a Greenfinch which was obvious when one landed on the feeders next to them. (Greenfinch are the bully boys of the feeders). If you have pairs of birds in your garden now, they could be nesting in the vicinity.

Let us hope the weather improves soon so we can enjoy this most beautiful time of the year.

Thank you for your sightings: -

Roger Kite S10 – 30.1.24 – 2 Redwing; 20.3.24 – 1st Frogspawn in pond and 3 Palmate Newts; 17.2.24 – 4 Lapwing flying round on conduit at Redmires.

Mavis Roadhouse S10 – 1.3.24 – Sparrow Hawk plucking pigeon on lawn.

Mark Bateman S6 – Barn Owl flew across Rails Road when he was driving. (7.15 pm).

Jude Lamb S6 – 19.1.24 – 15 male and 7 female Mandarin in Havelock Pond; Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker in garden.

Julie Heathcote S6 – Watched a Dipper singing on a rock in valley for 10 minutes, and saw 3 Bullfinches, 1 Treecreeper, 1 Robin, Blue Tits and 1 Heron. Lovely – unusual to watch a Dipper for so long without it being spooked.

Jack Nuttgens S6 – 23.2.24 – Treecreeper and Long-tailed Tits near Uppercut Wheel; 2

Buzzards soaring over Millstone Edge Rough, one with several primaries missing.

Neil Porter S6 – Tawny Owl calling daily since 6.1.24; 28.1.24 – 4 Raven flew southwest over Tofts Lane (anyone else seen a Raven?); Pair of Bullfinches visiting feeders all year; 2 Buzzards regularly over valley; No Dippers seen near wild swimmers' pool nest site but 3 seen on river near Frank Wheel; Grey Heron seen regularly; Great Spotted Woodpecker heard drumming on 13.3.24.

John Blewitt S6 – 26.3.24 – 2 Kingfishers displaying near New Dam; 28.3.24 – 7 tiny Trout seen during Riverfly monitoring below Wolf Wheel and a Dipper and Treecreeper seen also.

Joan Buckland S10 – Regular visitors to garden – Sparrows, Dunnock, Blackbirds, Crows, Starling, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tits, Goldcrest, Greenfinch, Magpie, Feral and Wood Pigeons, Robin. Occasionally – Wren, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Brambling, Goldfinch. Saw first Holly Blue butterfly and Lacewing on 5th April.

Joan Buckland 10.4.24

**RVCG would like to thank Valleyside
Garden Centre for their continued
support.**