

Newsletter

Promoting and protecting heritage and wildlife



Summer 2025 no 133

From the Chair

I have now had a while to absorb the spectrum of work that the RVCG committee and members are involved in, and I have to say it's a steep learning curve. There will be members who regularly use the RVCG website which has plenty of up-to-date information on it (I hope to join the website team for an online meeting this month) and members who rely on the newsletter and email communications. There is plenty going on at the moment.

Our new events organiser, Rachel, has helpfully put together a schedule of events so that the committee can see where they are needed and of course we have recently had stalls at Crosspool Street Fayre and Stannington Carnival. Graham Appleby is a star in getting the stall and all the paraphernalia required to the site on time. There is a wealth of information about the valley available on the stall and I have been impressed by the popularity of it. There are usually a few good stories from the past that are recollected by visitors and new members join up as well. I can tell you the top three attractions so far, although different festivals require a slightly different focus.

Top of the attractions is undoubtedly Mr W. Binney's 1953 working model of Nether Cut wheel which fascinates the younger children and reminds the more mature visitors of events in their childhood. It stands next to a model of the valley prepared, I believe, when the flood management proposals for the Rivelin included installing two massive dams. Fortunately, I think those proposals were unaffordable since the dams would have had a disastrous effect on the valley as we know it. Second is Joan Buckland's wildlife section with opportunities for children to colour in dragonfly wings. In third position has been the sale of bird boxes and insect hotels. Graham also acquires sundry donations which go for ridiculously low prices. (Note we still have two lawn mowers!)

Our next big event will be a Heritage Open day stand in Walkley on September 20th.

The committee are active in attending a number of meetings on behalf of RVCG. There

Contacts

Chairperson	Neil Porter
Treasurer	Christine Roe
Secretary	VACANCY
Membership	Graham Roe
Task Team	Graham Appleby
Newsletter	C & G Roe
Group Recorder	Joan Buckland
Website	Greg Shaw, Sue Shaw & Mark Bateman
Speaker Organiser	Ciarán 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

are the Don, Dearne & Rother Network, Joined up Heritage Sheffield, and Sheffield Green Spaces Forum to name just a few. I attended the latter at Parkwood Springs on July 16th. We are required to attend 4 meeting per annum in order to get insurance cover from the Council. There were about 30 people there, all from similar organisations as our own. Some of the interesting topics up for discussion included the Blue and Green strategy (must learn about that) guidance for commercial dog walkers and indeed dog walkers in general, and deer management, which isn't too big a problem for us at the moment. Nobody mentioned wild swimming which is an issue for the valley when 50 people turn up for the plunge pool. Having looked at YouTube videos of the plunge pool I can understand why youngsters in particular find it attractive. Music and pictures look incredible.

That brings me to the problem of managing visitor pressure on popular sites. With the really good weather recently the valley has had an unprecedented influx of visitors. This is evident on Rivelin Valley Road and at Rails Road car park which, once full, results in dangerous parking on Rails Road and on both left and right hand sides of Rivelin Valley Road.

I'm not sure how we can manage that but with an increasing prevalence of speeding and

associated noise sometimes at unsocial hours, Rachel and I have contacted a number of local councillors including Tom Hunt. I will be setting up a meeting with Richard Williams and Will Sapwell to discuss these issues very soon.

Undoubtedly, we will need evidence to support our claims, but hopefully we can, for example, get speed cameras reinstalled at the very least.

We have now had three meetings with Dr Justin Morey, Senior lecturer in Sound and Music at Leeds Beckett and Sheffield University. He will be submitting an application for funds to create an art project in the Valley. So far this has involved Lizzie Craig Atkins from the School of History, Philosophy and Digital Humanities at Sheffield University, Matt Green, sound artist from Leeds Beckett, Trudi Entwistle, sculptor and landscape artist, Fay Musselwhite, local poet, and Ruthie Ford. Given the profusion of ideas, it will be late summer before the proposal is finalised, but it looks a very interesting potential artistic addition to the valley's repertoire.

One of the pleasant outcomes of our recent good weather has been a welcome return of many more butterflies in the valley. I bumped into a gentleman with a large lens camera on Tofts Lane recently, I asked him if he had any decent photos to which he replied 'Not good for birds at the moment', but he had seen 15 species of butterfly mainly on the grassland just in front of old King Edwards Hospital. This



included a White Letter Hairstreak, which I thought was pretty rare. You may remember, during the Sheffield Tree saga, a tree on Chelsea Road,

Nether Edge was threatened with felling but there was a big fuss because it was a host tree for this species. I enquired if the Sorby Natural History Society had any records for the valley. It turns out that they had quite a few, which are reliant on elm trees in the valley. I am not sure where those elms are but thanks to Carl Corbridge for the photo. A Google search also revealed that the larvae of this butterfly were spotted on Hagg Lane beyond Same Hill Farm on March 5th 2003 as reported in the RVCG newsletter!

I have cancelled the July Committee meeting and rescheduled for August, where we will see if any progress has been made on the project to get Local Nature Reserve status for parts of the valley, a number of difficult planning issues which members have contacted

us about, and with luck I can expand on my intention to produce a management plan for the RVCG

Neil Porter

New Committee Member

I'm very pleased to be serving the committee as their newest member, organising events and activities. I've enjoyed the Rivelin valley for many years as a Walkley resident and offered to join the committee at the AGM in March. We have a varied programme of activities and speakers throughout the year and are looking to organise more; already since May our committee members have led nature walks as part of Environment Weeks and organised task team days to repair the footpaths. I was able to join committee members at the Crosspool



Street Fayre and Stannington Carnival stalls, which were brilliant! It was great to meet members and non-members of RVCG at these events, share the memories and knowledge so many people have for the Rivelin Valley. So do say hello if you see me out and about, I regularly walk

the valley with my friendly, little black dog or you may see me exploring the bridleways on horseback. I'm open to new ideas, feedback on our current programme, or suggestions for what you would like to see or be a part of. I'll be at the Heritage Open Day at Walkley Community Centre on 20th September and really look forward to meeting you there.

Rachel Wileman, rachel.rvcg@outlook.com

It's not too late to join in! Follow the link below.

The [Big Butterfly Count 2025](#) is between the 18th of July and 10th of August.



Counting butterflies can be described as taking the pulse of nature and we depend on you, our citizen scientists, to help us assess how much help nature needs. The data from this and other counts will also help us to identify important trends in species that will assist us in planning how to protect butterflies from extinction, as well as understanding the effect of climate change on wildlife.

Butterfly Conservation Website

Rivelin Valley Footpath Repairs

The Sheffield City Council (SCC) has a responsibility to maintain public footpaths. Exceptional weather conditions have caused damage to Council infrastructure worse than any witnessed in recent history. The last named storm affecting Rivelin Valley was storm Babet in 2023, which seriously damaged footpaths, dams, and weirs, that are hundreds of years old. The SCC Public Rights of Way (PROW) group has a legal responsibility to restore footpaths or provide a suitable alternative. The restoration of weirs and dam structures is seen as less important, as the original purpose of those structures was to drive the Rivelin mill wheels which no longer exist. The loss of a weir is a mixed blessing as it allows fish to move up and down the river more easily, but the associated dam will dry out with the loss of all the wildlife dependent on the habitat. Also, with the loss of a weir the level of the river drops dramatically, which also affects the wildlife living in the river. River wildlife can probably adapt to the new conditions but the loss of water in a dam will lead to more severe changes in habitats.

The Rivelin Valley Conservation Group (RVCG) has spent the last 18 months helping restore the Rivelin nature trail and other infrastructure, within its capability, with the support of the Council who own the land. The Council have major financial challenges and there is little money available for such major repairs which are often overshadowed by other Council priorities. However, there is some money, and SCC PROW group is putting plans together to restore our Rivelin footpaths. Many stepping stone crossings got damaged or washed away completely during Storm Babet. The Council have done some temporary repairs, where possible, with plans for more substantial restoration in the coming months, although other work will happen over a couple of years.

The Rivelin Valley Public Rights of Way reinstatement project has confirmed that the contractor Esh will be commencing the works at the first two sites from Monday 4th August. Esh plan to complete the works by 2nd September (about 4 weeks). The first site is the stepping stones across the Rivelin, behind the water treatment works below Fox Hagg and the second site is near the top car park at Wyming Brook. A third project is waiting the approval of a Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) for the restoration of the bridge crossing behind Havelock Dam. This work is planned to commence in October 2025.

The Rivelin Valley has two other seriously damaged sites at Hind Wheel, and the footpaths leading to and from Hind Wheel.

These infrastructure repairs are far more challenging and hence relatively expensive. Representatives from various Council departments and RVCG met on site recently to discuss these repairs. Restoration is being planned for the footpaths, and the funding is being negotiated between the various Council departments, and possibly from other outside sources. Hind Wheel itself is a large leaky dam and full restoration would probably be ridiculously expensive. It has also been affected recently by floating pennywort and blue/green algae. Its closure and rewilding would mean a major habitat loss and so the RVCG will support the creation of a smaller wildlife pond, as happened at Rivelin Corn Mill at Rails Road back in 2006. We feel this will be a fair compromise and will make the best use of Council funds. Hind Wheel dam, the oldest dam in the Valley, is looking quite sad at the moment. Recent storms have caused further damage to recent Council repairs and the water has become overrun by horsetails. It is now our greatest wish to see a form of wildlife pond restored at Hind Wheel.

There are only six Rivelin dams remaining with a substantial body of water out of the 21 dams that drove the original Rivelin mills over the last four centuries. The RVCG will do all it can to help maintain these for wildlife and for future generations to enjoy.



*Hind Wheel dam overrun by horsetails.
Graham Appleby*

Task Team

April Task Day

Footpath repairs continued at Holme Head Wheel adding to the work already done on previous task days. Unfortunately, I forgot to bring my mobile phone and was unable to record the day although Scott Berg provided some photos. Instead, I returned the following day to capture the completed work. Ranger Ryan provided revetment boards and pins, and we had 17 eager volunteers attend the event.



*Compacting the footpath material at Holme Head.
Photo: Scott Berg*



*A section of completed footpath at Holme Head.
Photo: Graham Appleby*



*Footpath material at Nether Cut being barrowed to
Holme Head. Photo: Scott Berg*



*The once squelchy uneven footpath at Holme Head
weir is now looking so much better. Photo: Graham
Appleby*

May Task Day

Having completed most of the footpath work at Holme Head, I was keen to prevent any future flood water from damaging the footpath and driveway down to Nether Cut again. Ranger Ryan provided a couple of sleepers, and we installed these at the top of the drive and covered them in mesh.



*Installation of the flood water diversion at the top of
Nether Cut drive.*

This was purely experimental and if successful, will be repeated at other locations.



The completed floodwater diversion at the top of Nether Cut drive at the S bend.

We also dug another trench to divert water under the footpath at Holme Head however having removed the soil we discovered an old existing drain. We broke into the drain and created a sink to capture the stream water and send it straight into the river. Volunteers were not amused to have to back-fill the trench.



Volunteers backfilling the trench at Holme Head and diverting a stream into an existing drain.

We also removed a trip hazard boulder from the middle of the path which unexpectedly took 6 exhausted volunteers about 40 minutes to dig out and remove.

Other volunteers cut back the under-growth and removed Himalayan balsam. One volunteer also cleaned and painted the interpretation board at Holme Head Wheel.



Wendy Hall cleaning and painting the Holme Head Wheel interpretation board.



Alex Dobson and daughter Sophia remove brash from along the footpath at Holme Head.

We had four separate teams working in different areas and together accomplished so much in just 4 hours. Excellent teamwork providing a much-improved nature trail for the enjoyment of Rivelin's visitors.

Graham Appleby, Task Team Leader

Open meeting 15th May 2025 on "The Plight of the Water Vole" and "Track and Trace, eDNA monitoring of Ratty at Redmires"

Christine Gregory introduced an audience of around 45 people to the UK's most endangered mammal – the water vole. Christine has been



helping to conserve them for many years so was well placed to give details on this rodent, a native to the UK which can trace its origins back over 2.5 million years. Here in Sheffield people are very lucky to have seen those which reside at Redmires. Water voles are diurnal and

love water courses with emergent, semi emergent and banks with lots of vegetation. Water quality is less important as it is thought this helps deter predators. Water voles like canals where water levels do not fluctuate greatly (helps keep burrows dry) and where bank erosion is minimised.

Water voles are hungry animals needing to eat 80% of their body weight each day. Disturbance by humans and dogs is a problem as it reduces grazing time. Females mark their territories with up to 6 latrines which they build up over time. Latrine spotting was used in the past as a way of estimating water vole populations. Each female will have 3-5 litters a year of 5-6 babies. Between 1990/91 and 1996/98 80% of the water vole population of the UK (~6 million) was lost. This was in part due to predation by stoats, weasels, pike, owls and mink but also land use and climate changes affecting water courses and draining wetlands.

Debrah Dawson, a researcher in Biosciences at the University of Sheffield, has for some time been running projects (NERC and Yorkshire Water funded) trying to see if eDNA can be used as a non-invasive way of monitoring water vole populations. Jenifer Stagg's Master's thesis did just this by sampling sites at Redmires and down the Rivelin and analysing the water for its eDNA. This showed that Redmires has a genetically diverse water vole population but also that 2 km downstream from Redmires

there was no Water Vole DNA and presumably therefore no water voles at present. However, further down the Rivelin is an unrelated water vole community whose DNA is closer to that of water voles found in Bakewell. It is speculated this is a residual population from the last ice age. The eDNA also showed the presence of mink – an invasive species – in the lower part of the Rivelin which is less welcome news.

The evening was finished off with Gwydion Elliot's current Master's research looking at using eDNA to look at the health and diversity of water vole populations across Derbyshire. It has been shown that ill-advised introductions can cause outbreeding and decreases of genetic fitness. His work hopes to better advise where introductions can safely take place and better match DNA diversity of these introductions to the existing populations.

Mark Bateman

Sheffield Environment Weeks – Rivelin Guided Walks

The Sheffield Environment weeks gave the RVCG an opportunity to invite the general public on a guided tour of lower Rivelin with a Tuesday evening walk on the 13th May and repeated the next morning at 10am. The walk began at Loxley Corn Mill and finished at Rivelin Park and included a guided tour of the world famous Mousehole Forge. Over twenty people joined us on a beautiful evening walk with around ten people the next morning. The walk was led by Graham Appleby who was supported by several members of the committee. Graham loves giving this guided tour as there is so much history covering this first mile of the Rivelin Valley which he hopes to repeat on an annual basis.

Graham Appleby



A display of original Mousehole Forge anvils and a leg vice collected by current owner Mark Baldwin – Photo: Graham Appleby

Crosspool Festival

The Crosspool Festival week opened on the 27th of June with the installation and blessing of the well-dressing at the junction of Watt Lane and Selbourne Road. The RVCG trailer had been used to soak the wooden frame for a week before being delivered to the well-dressing team who filled it with clay and completed the design using petals and a variety of other materials to a design celebrating the end of the second world war.



Crosspool Well Dressing 2025

The well-dressing depicts a picture of a living room with two pets as a soldier enters having arrived home after the war. This is the associated information.



The Crosspool Well Dressing description

The RVCG had a stall at the Crosspool Street Market on the following Sunday. The weather was very warm and calm and fortunately the intensity of the sun was subdued by an overcast

sky. We had a 9:30 start to set up the stall and the event eventually opened officially at 12 noon. Everything seemed to go to plan and the RVCG had a good day selling a few books and bird boxes and meeting lots of people interested in our work in the Rivelin Valley. Our model mill attracted a lot of children and Joan Buckland also brought her collection of wildlife exhibits to entertain the children.



The RVCG stall at the Crosspool Street Fayre with volunteers Joan Buckland, Neil Porter and Sue Shaw

The event closed at 4pm and we all went home exhausted. Thank you to everyone who volunteered to help on the day.

Graham Appleby

Stannington Carnival



Photo: Graham Appleby

RVCG had a stall at the Stannington Carnival on 12th July. It was a gloriously hot (too hot?) day which saw lots of people in attendance. RVCG exhibited the models of Rivelin and the Nether Cut Mill as well as a range of old photographs and literature about the valley. We had a good amount of interest and it was great to meet RVCG members and to sign up a few more to the group.

Mark Bateman

Coming up This Autumn

Heritage Open Days 2025

Walkley to Rivelin - the heritage and wildlife of the Rivelin Valley

On Saturday 20th, as part of the National Heritage Open Days (HOD), Walkley will be staging activities and displays in a number of its historic buildings including Walkley St Mary's Church, Walkley Community Centre, Fir Street, Sheffield Buddhist Centre (formerly St Joseph's Industrial School).

RVCG will be taking part by having a display in the Walkley Community Centre, Fir Street, which will explain the structure of the old mills and bridges by the river along the 3-mile nature and heritage trail, one of the most popular routes in the valley. Old photos, drawings, current and old maps of the area will be on display, and you can pick up some trail maps. Come and see a 3D model of part of the valley, and a working model of a waterwheel and grinding workshop.

Children's activities will include a nature corner about animal homes, including a 'where do I live' game where children can try to match the 'house' to the animal. We will also have drawing and making activities and some creepy crawlies to look at.

Details of all the events in Walkley can be found at

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/site-search.html?q=walkley>

Christine Roe

Autumn Open Meetings

Our Autumn series will open on Thursday 11th September with Peter Machan's heritage talk entitled "The Last of the Little Mesters?". Peter has been fascinated by the surviving heritage of



the Sheffield cutlery industry and has charted and researched the traditional craftspeople and their premises over the last 40 or so years. His talk is based on his recent book and follows the rise, decline and survival of the Sheffield metal trades. In particular, it illustrates the state

of the traditional cutlery and silverware trades in the city today.

The next meeting on 9th October will be graced by Tom Dunne from the Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SWRT). Tom is farm manager at Ughill Farm: SWRT's newest acquisition and site of their model for how farming and nature can thrive together. Tom will explain how farming can be both productive and environmentally responsible, by restoring habitats, improving soil health, and adopting flexible farming practices. The farm on the western edge of Sheffield, is an important site for curlews, golden plover and other nationally threatened wading birds that come to our moors each spring in order to breed.

Finally, on 13th November we will round off our Autumn series with an engaging presentation from The Sheffield Swift Network. The Network is dedicated to the protection of swifts in the city. Members of the Network will bring some examples of swift nesting provisions that they will talk about in their presentation. The evening will also include a heart-warming 10-minute film about members of the Network's personal experiences rehabilitating fallen swifts. Overall, expect an insight into the secret life of these stunning creatures and what it takes to release them back into the wild.

Ciarán McInerney

Planning Matters

Until recently it has been a relatively quiet period for planning in the valley.

Two 5G Monopoles were refused on Stannington Road and Redmires Road.

There have been ongoing applications at both Rails House Farm and Same Hill Farm. The Rails House Farm application mainly concerned external materials. While the materials for the walls and roof were approved (stone and slate), the windows (aluminium proposed, but SCC wish to see timber), doors surrounds and lintels (sufficient detail not submitted) were all refused.

We currently have some issues with Same Hill Farm, where a two-storey extension has been conditionally granted permission, despite objections mainly focused on the visibility of the proposed development. Further concerns were raised about additional external lights that had not been agreed. Unfortunately, they had not been removed after the 21-day period stipulated by the Council. Other works being carried out without permission have now been halted by the Council's Planning Enforcement Team.

Ciarán McInerney

Water voles and mink in Rivelin

Those of you who came to our May Open Meeting will have heard that the researchers from the University of Sheffield detected some DNA evidence of water voles at several places along the river, as well as evidence of mink near the café. These animals haven't been recorded recently here so please do look out for them, or evidence of them, when you are out and about in the valley. Bear in mind that the DNA could have been washed in from up to a kilometre or so away. The People's Trust for Endangered Species has produced a useful guide of what to look out for:

<https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Your-guide-to-looking-for-signs-of-water-voles-and-other-riverbank-species.pdf>

Sue Shaw

1955 US aeroplane crash on Lodge Moor hospital

A local resident recently told me that he remembered an aeroplane crash on Lodge Moor Hospital in 1955. I don't recall hearing about this before, so I wanted to look into the story. I found the details online at:

<https://www.chrishobbs.com/lodgemoor1955.htm>, which also has some copies of photos and press articles.

The American Air Force aircraft crashed just after 5 o'clock on 9th December 1955, on the North 1 and 2 wards of the hospital. The pilot of the aircraft was uninjured – he bailed out and landed near Hathersage. The aircraft tore the roof off a single-story cubicle ward, demolished a corridor, ploughed 200 feet through a sanitary block, and then burst into flames in a quadrangle. One patient was killed and seven others slightly injured. The woman killed, Mrs Elsie Murdock, aged 46, of South Road, Sheffield was due for release within 48 hours. The injured were three children and four adults. Patients in the affected parts of the building were quickly transferred to other wards.

Dr. Joseph M. Kennedy, medical superintendent of the hospital who was sitting in an office 50 yards away from the crash heard the sound of the aircraft low over the hospital. "Suddenly there was this terrific crash, and we all rushed out as we thought it was crashing into the tower" he said. An official said the rescue work went on efficiently and the patients kept calm.

A statement issued by the United States Air Force stated that the aircraft had taken off from Sculthorpe (RAF Sculthorpe, Norfolk) on instrument training flight when the pilot experienced a "flame out". After several attempts to restart the engine, he elected to

bale out at 3,500 feet. Ammunition was stored in the aircraft's wings.

Local MPs raised the matter in Parliament, asking amongst other things, why the aircraft was loaded with live ammunition despite being on a training mission. This had hampered the rescue operations and meant that the result would have been much worse had the aircraft landed on one of the steelworks. You can read the Hansard report at [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1955-12-21/debates/1cb98cb6-2f30-4f2b-a9d5-0d444eabaf9c/LodgeMoorHospital\(AircraftAccident\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1955-12-21/debates/1cb98cb6-2f30-4f2b-a9d5-0d444eabaf9c/LodgeMoorHospital(AircraftAccident))

Sue Shaw

Good news for Wyming Brook and Fox Hagg

Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust has been awarded almost £40,000 by Veolia Environmental Trust through the Landfill Communities Fund, to support tree-planting, flood-management and better access at Wyming Brook and Fox Hagg. Work is due to start this Autumn. This vital support will help them to boost habitat diversity for species like the pied flycatcher, tawny owl, wood warbler, and nightjar. They plan to increase the adaptability of the area by planting a greater mix of tree species that are resilient to climate change. Additionally, they will create more wet features such as leaky dams that provide natural flood management, and plan to improve access to the reserves so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of nature and green spaces. This will include improving surfaces and steps, as well as installing new educational maps and signage to engage visitors.

Sue Shaw

Exploring Family History in the Rivelin Valley.

I have been researching my own family history for many years (in London, Suffolk and the West Country), so when RVCG received two enquiries recently about families in the valley, I offered to follow them up. Using census records, RVCG research and comparing names, places and maps I was able to help both enquirers.

The first knew her ancestor, Elizabeth Elvidge lived at 'Rivelin Mill' in 1851. I was able to confirm that this was Rivelin Corn Mill, which at the time had a collection of buildings used as housing. Elizabeth lived there with her family. Her father, the head of the household, was a farm labourer and there were two farms nearby, where he may have worked. I was pleased to find the other residents in the mill buildings were the Superintendent of the Flour Mill,

Joseph Taylor, a waggoner at the mill, Richard Parson, and a miller, William Bunting.

The other enquiry involved the Womack family of Stannington. Francis Womack was part of a larger family who were believed to have been 'owners' of a razor grinding mill. I found lots of Womack family members in the area.

Looking at the 1851 census for Francis Womack, he was living at Nethergate and most of the people living in the Stannington area were grinders and by far the most common were razor grinders. The Rivelin Valley Conservation Group have researched the mills in the valley and we know that Wolf Wheel and Swallow Wheel, just down the hill from Stannington definitely had wheels (or trows) specifically for razor grinders. There is no evidence of Womacks owning a wheel, but there were a lot of his family living and working in the area. All the later census results for Francis are for various addresses in the Stannington area, including Knowl Top, and Tofts Lane.

I also found Thomas Womack (born about 1804), probably one of Francis's uncles living at Well Farm, described as a farmer of 11 acres and a razor grinder. This was quite common in the area, as neither farming or grinding alone were sufficient to keep a man and his family.

Do any of you or your friends and neighbours know any more about these families or their descendants? I am happy to pass on any more information, or perhaps you would like to write about your family for a future edition of the newsletter?

Christine Roe

THE RECORDER – SUMMER 2025

Midsummer has come and gone. South Yorkshire is now officially in a drought and using hosepipes is forbidden. Spring was very dry. March had only 25% of the usual rainfall and was the warmest March ever recorded in Europe. There were very few showers in April, and 1st May was the hottest Mayday on record. June was also hot and sunny with hardly any rain. The first substantial rain fell on 15th July, which watered the garden and refilled the water butts. Until then I had been using grey water for the garden. Much more rain is needed to fill the reservoirs.

Despite, or maybe because of this, everything looked lush. The blossoms were beautiful and not spoiled by the usual wind and rain. Den Bank Wood put on a good show of bluebells and my Primroses lasted for ages. Butterflies suddenly appeared in the last week of April and people reported having insects on their car windows and radiators. The Starlings were feasting on this aerial bounty. Hopefully there were plenty left for Philip Walshaw's

Swifts that arrived on 1st May. The most Swifts I have seen in their evening gathering are eight, which is a very low number compared to previous years. I have not seen a Swallow or a House Martin at all in the area. Another thing missing is the tiny black Pollen Beetle, *Meligethes* species. They are important pollinators, feeding on pollen and can usually be seen easily on yellow flowers. In previous years there were so many that they covered the sheets on the washing line. Where have they gone? My garden was full of Buttercups, Cat's Ears, Dandelions, and Welsh Poppies with no sign of the beetle. Even though they were absent from my garden, they should have been nearby. My next-door neighbour and I both have Tansy growing. On 13th July his was covered in 7-spot Ladybirds. I counted over 50. Mine had lots of small mining bees and no ladybirds. It demonstrates that each garden has its own local ecosystem. So maybe you have had the Pollen Beetles in your garden. Please let me know.



Tansy (Photo: GardenersWorld.Com)

Another sign that things are out of sync is that the predatory Soldier Beetles usually coincide with the flowering of Cow Parsley. That plant has now gone over, and I did not see any beetles on it. The beetle is now feeding on the aphids on Tansy. The beetle is lucky it has another source of food but some insects feed on specific plants and if they cannot find the plant their numbers would decrease, or in severe cases they could die out locally. That is why it is important to survey areas before destroying habitat. Amphibians are also in decline due to the destruction of traditional ponds. If you have room the best thing you can do is have a pond, even a small one. You will be surprised at how quickly creatures will find it, and with your encouragement children will be fascinated with pond life. If you put a small amount of frogspawn in a tank you will be amazed as little balls of jelly turn into perfect little frogs. Never take frogspawn from the wild, just wait until frogs decide they want to breed in your pond.

There is an FSC (Field Studies Council) guide to keeping common frog tadpoles which is very helpful. I have been doing this for some years now and if you need any advice please get in touch. This year, so far, I have put 16 froglets out and 3 more will be going out soon. As it has been so dry, I have watered the area around the pond and put the tiny froglets nearby in the evening when the birds have finished feeding. This gives them a better chance of survival. Also, baby birds could starve if caterpillars are not available at the right time. Keeping the bird feeders topped up will help but is no substitute for natural systems.

Our berry bushes have done well this year, and we have a good supply of blackcurrants, gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries. The slugs and snails did not cause much damage as they were hiding due to the dry, hot weather, and now it has rained they will be out in force. They are part of the food chain and birds, especially Blackbirds, will be eating them. If you are lucky enough to have Hedgehogs they will also eat many. Please do not put slug pellets out or any other poisonous chemicals. Hedgehogs are in decline and slug pellets are one of the reasons why.

It is turning out to be a much better year for insects. The *Buddleia* has actually lived up to its name as the butterfly tree. In my garden this year I have had Orange-tip, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Holly Blue, many Small and Large Whites, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Comma, Green-veined White and Peacock butterflies. Carl Corbridge counted fifteen different species of butterfly in a field near the river on 12th July, including a female White-letter Hairstreak, small and large Skippers and Small Copper.



Elephant Hawk Moth (Photo: ukmoths.org.uk)

In the last few weeks moth numbers have also increased (our visiting Noctule bat will be happy). We have had some beautiful moths including Swallow-tailed Moth, Elephant Hawk Moth, Brimstone, Marbled Beauty, Large Yellow

Underwing, Box Tree Moth, Riband Wave, Heart and Dart, Flame Shoulder, Common Emerald, True Lover's Knot, Small Yellow Wave, Foxglove Pug and Garden Carpet. If you have a Box hedge, be on the lookout for the caterpillars of the Box Tree Moth which can destroy the plant. It only arrived in Britain from the Far East in 2008 and has rapidly spread northwards. There should be plenty of Froghoppers around as there was lots of 'cuckoo-spit' on plants, especially noticeable on Lavender. The froth would have been particularly good at protecting the nymphs from drying out during the hot, dry weather.

I hope the plunge pool has not been overused, though I suspect it will have been. On the evening of 12th July, on our return from the Stannington Carnival, we passed Rails Road which was parked up completely and there were also cars parked along Rivelin Valley Road. This is not good news for the wildlife, especially the Dippers. Too much disruption and they will desert one of their traditional breeding sites. There are other places to swim that will not affect the natural world.

Thank you for your sightings:-

Graham Appleby S10 – 27.4.25 – Heron on Holme Head Wheel. 26.4.25 – hears Chiffchaff regularly and saw one close up in Rivelin; End of April – 5 Starlings came into garden every day searching for grubs in the lawn (these would have been leatherjackets, the larvae of crane flies).

Christine Roe, S10 – 20.5.25 -young sprightly fox which must have jumped over fence to get into garden; 23.5.25 – male Broad-bodied Chaser Dragonfly by the pond, also several small Red Damselflies, 2 of which were mating.

Sue Shaw S10 – 11.6.25 – footbridge Wolf Wheel Blackcap in tree besides river; Grey Wagtail on stones in river near Wolf Mill Dam; Heron on dam; female Mandarin with 6 ducklings on river below Frank footbridge; Heron flew in and tried to take a duckling but chased off by female Mandarin; 8.6.25 – Sparrowhawk came down next to her pond with prey.

Neil Porter S6 – 23.5.25 – Dipper with food next to Wolf Wheel; 23.5.25 – 7 Mandarins near café area.

Ben S6 – saw Dippers and Frogs between Hind and Frank Wheel in April.

Joan Buckland 16.7.25

Wildlife Reflections

'No mow May' led me to leave large areas of my lawn fallow again. I first had a large carpet of daisies for several weeks, particularly attractive to insects, followed by several weeks of a terrific display of buttercups. Whenever I disturb long grass, small moths flutter around which makes me realise just how much wildlife depends on unruly gardens.

I have a dramatic self-setting grass in my garden that has appeared in my flower beds over the last couple of years. It's called 'Carex pendula' or 'pendulous sedge'.



'Carex Pendula' – also known as hanging or weeping sedge

It is a very ornate grass with attractive flower heads but it seeds everywhere and so I have done a bit of research to understand a bit more about it and quite surprisingly, it is not classed as an invasive species. It is a clump forming plant of wet woodlands and riversides where it also spreads using underground rhizomes although it appears to be doing very well in my very dry garden. Therefore, I will probably keep one specimen and remove the small pups as and when they appear.

The nesting season arrived with only one of my six bird boxes occupied. One morning I was horrified to see a magpie, terrorising a young bird. Rather than bolting into the hedge where it could hide, it flew over my garden hedge and into the allotments and out of site closely followed by its pursuer. I have seen magpies take young fledglings before which seems to be

an annual sport for them. What is more annoying is that they often dominate my bird feeders along with jays and wood pigeons which are not the birds I am really trying to feed. Not until the larger birds have moved away do the smaller birds arrive. Usually, flocks of small birds of different species arrive and silently swarm over the feeders before moving on. It's interesting how the bird song and chattering has almost disappeared now the nesting season is well under way. I guess there is no longer a reason to attract a mate!

Graham Appleby

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