

Newsletter

Promoting and protecting heritage and wildlife



Spring 2026 no 136

Chris Baines



We are delighted that Chris Baines, one of our honorary members, has been awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society. This medal was established in 1897 to enable the RHS Council to confer conspicuous honour on those British horticulturists deserving of special honour. In recognition of the duration of Queen Victoria's reign, only 63 medals may be held at any one time.

Chris has had a long and distinguished career as a landscape gardener, teacher and ecologist, and has been a leading figure in wildlife gardening and the urban wildlife movement, showing that wildlife could thrive everywhere – demolition sites, road verges, parks and gardens. He created the first wildlife garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 1985 and his best-selling book *How to Make a Wildlife Garden* has now been in print for 40 years. He has written widely for gardening and countryside magazines and has created films and television series for the BBC that helped to shape the foundation of the urban green infrastructure movement.

Chris grew up around the Rivelin valley and has been involved with RVCG for many years. He was particularly instrumental in bringing together pictures by and details of the Rivelin Valley Artists (one of whom was his grandfather) who were based at Rivelin Corn Mill in the 1920s.

(<https://rivelinvalley.org.uk/rivelin-arts/>).

Contacts

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Chairperson | Neil Porter |
| Treasurer | Christine Roe |
| Secretary | VACANCY |
| Membership | Graham Roe |
| Task Team | Graham Appleby |
| Newsletter | C & G Roe |
| Group Recorder | Gerry Firkins |
| Website | Greg Shaw, Sue Shaw & Mark Bateman |
| Speaker Organiser | Ciarán McInerney |
| Events Organiser | VACANCY |
| Conservation Advisor | Roger Kite |

If you wish to contact us please email
rivelin.valley@gmail.com
or visit the website

RSPB Sounds of...

Chris Baines established International Dawn Chorus Day, which this year is coming up on the first Sunday of May (May 3, 2026). You may want to join an organised walk so that you can be told what you are listening to, or just sit in your own garden or go for an early walk. You don't necessarily have to get up at dawn to enjoy listening to birds, but that's when they are at their best.

RSPB have some guides to get you started, including Sounds of Parks and Gardens, Woodlands, Farmland and Uplands.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/sounds-of-spring/>. If you use a smart phone, the Merlin app is also very helpful in identifying bird calls.

From the Chair

I have now completed my first year as Chair of the RVCG and I must confess to being a little daunted at times with the amount of work involved and the commitment of all the Committee members. 2025/26 has indeed been a very busy year and we ended with a very respectable number of households (298) subscribing. The challenge will be to repeat that this year.

The AGM on April 16th went well with the help of Pie and Peas from Helen's Bakery. I hope those who attended will not mind me replicating the information I gave out at the

AGM. On the night we also celebrated the contributions of Keith Kendall and Joan Buckland who both received a token of our appreciation

I thought I should document the amount of effort that goes into running the group, which at its heart is trying to promote and protect our beautiful Rivelin Valley.

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| Committee Meetings | 11 | All months except December |
| Additional Committee Meetings | 3 | Walking the Rivelin revision Local Nature Reserve status Management Plan |
| Website meetings | Monthly on-line | |
| Open meeting talks | 6 | |
| Mandatory and other Meetings with other organisations | Green Spaces Forum, bimonthly Waterway Strategy Group Joined up Heritage Sheffield Loxley and Wadsley Commoners Friends of Porter Valley Local Councillor R Williams and SWLAC | We must attend to get Public Liability Insurance Focus on proposals by fishing lobby to remove weirs Opportunity to help each other Discussion on common issues Speeding and Safety issues on Rivelin Valley Road |
| Meetings on Rivelin specific issues | Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SRWT) Nikki Rivers, Sheffield Council Ecologist Vanessa Lyons, Sheffield Council Woodlands Manager Clare Beasant Yorkshire Water, River Health + 2 Rangers Waterlife Recovery Trust | Prep for bid for Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status Walk the valley, noting problems and issues Ditto with plans for follow up Advice on Rivelin issues Possible Mink eradication |
| Art in the Rivelin Valley | Justin Morey, Leeds Beckett and Sheffield University Sheffield University Landscape Architect students Sheffield Hallam Kaisu Koski & Fine Art Students | Funding bid for a spectrum of art projects in the valley 12 week projects on themes inspired by Rivelin (65 students) Ditto (9 students) |
| Newsletter preparation | Quarterly | |
| Membership | Maintain database | |
| Finance | Maintain bank & PayPal accounts | |
| Outside Events attended | Crosspool Street Market Stannington Carnival Walkley Heritage Open Day Sheffield Heritage Weekend | June 29 th July 12 th -13 th September 20 th January 24 th -25 th |
| RVCG Events | Environment week walks on May 13 th & 14 th | Sheffield Floods and History of Mills, including Mousehole Forge |
| Task Team Days | Several days with 20+ volunteers | Led by Graham Appelby and Ranger Ryan Atkins |
| Planning Applications Review | Multiple monthly applications overseen by Stuart Howden and Ciarán McInerney | Protection of Heritage, Wildlife and Green Belt of valley |

Having met a number of Council representatives and others, networking remains an important part of sustaining the group and I am committed to completing a management plan which can be used as a working manual for the committee but more importantly something that will bring better integration with those who we need to work with.

The nature trail is so well used that a key priority must be keeping the footpaths open. The damage done by Storm Babet in 2023 remains a big problem on the section between Hind Wheel and the S bend. Hopefully we can get some repairs carried out this year and preventative work on the dam wall breaches at Wolf Wheel. There was some robust discussion with the SCC representatives at the AGM, Vanessa Lyons and our ranger Ryan. I think they know how we feel about restoration of these public rights of way but importantly they acknowledge the work done by RVCG and will do their best for us.

Financially the group is in a good place but as the Treasurer pointed out, we had a quiet year in terms of expenditure. 2026 will be different.

We have a full programme of speakers lined up for the Autumn and plenty of walks planned too. Flora in April with Gerry Firkins, Bats in May with Bob Croxton and Fungi in October with Ziggy. Check the website for details and watch out for posters.

The walks with art students have already been rewarded with some excellent artwork inspired by the Rivelin, and Sue Shaw was able to attend an exhibition of their work. Hopefully we can get some of it displayed at our events.

I started my annual British Trust for Ornithology Waterway Breeding Bird Surveys for 2026 on April 18th, ably assisted by our local Sandygate Dental practice dentist and RVCG member John Alesbrook. Another will follow in May. It's usually a two and quarter hour walk commencing at 6am and records about 24 different bird species, mostly counted by sound.

At the AGM I extended a big thankyou to all the committee and the Task Team for their ongoing commitment. Rachel Wileman served as Events Organiser last year but unfortunately had to stand down from the committee in January. She will remain a member and help with posters in the valley. Two people expressed an interest in being involved so we will hopefully be getting some help this year. With Joan Buckland standing down as Wildlife Recorder, Gerry Firkins offered to help us out with the recording, in which case we will organise training courses on using iNaturalist.

We are now moving into the season of summer festivals, and with our planned walks I look forward to meeting members at these events.

Neil Porter

The Rivelin Inn



The Rivelin Inn is a well-known and popular feature in the valley offering fantastic views over the valley and very much a community pub. It closed in June 2025 and thankfully reopened at the end of November with Matthew Begley as the new landlord. He was a popular landlord at the Walkley Cottage until 2024 and greets you with a welcoming Aussie accent, having come originally from Brisbane.

The premises were originally built as mill cottages in 1862, and probably used as farm buildings before the earliest known record of it being licensed as a pub in 1881. It has been known as the Rivelin Hotel and Tavern in the past. The current owner thought that the cottages to the west of the pub were once used as an inn but there is no evidence to support that.

Records from the Sheffield Independent show that back in 1887 it was clearly used as a meeting place for competitive pigeon shooting. In 1889 the landlord was summoned for permitting drunkenness on the premises (a difficult line to take). In 1899 a pack of beagles met there for a beagle trail hunt.

I wondered if the Rivelin had any involvement with the 'rattening' disputes which were common in the valley in the 19th century but again I can find no records of this. Rattening was the name for disputes between employees in early unionisation groups in the cutlery and grinding trades and non-union workers who were regarded as 'scabs'. They were the result of employers using cheaper or unqualified men. Rattening involved sabotage of machinery, often wheel bands or tools. Nether Cut Wheel was targeted for special

attention (a bit like Putins' special operations?) as was Upper Cut Wheel in 1874

The Rivelin is mentioned plenty of times in relation to the Hallamshire Harriers popular Hallam Chase and had a reputation for hosting harvest songs.

It has been renovated again during the recent closure and I believe is now regaining its former popularity.



An old photo hanging in the pub now

The striking rocks behind the pub also were well known for the Man's Head Rock which unfortunately is mostly obscured by trees now. It must be an early photo edit that added the pipe!



Man's Head Rock

The pub is now open 7 days a week offering a lunch and evening menu and has a number of themed evenings to attract customers.

Neil Porter

Flea Treatments for Cats and Dogs.

The government is considering letting only vets and pharmacists give out potent pesticide-based flea treatments. At the moment they can be bought from any pet shop and used whether the animal has fleas or not. These treatments get into the animals' fur and then into the environment, where they can kill birds, fish and other aquatic creatures. Birds are using the fur to line their nests, leading to unhatched eggs and dead chicks, where there is a higher incidence of insecticides. These chemicals are being released into watercourses by treated animals swimming in waterways and from owners washing their hands after application. Imidacloprid and fipronil are powerful insecticides – one monthly treatment for a large dog contains enough Imidacloprid to kill 25 million bees. The Environment Agency has found traces of fipronil in 98% of river samples and imidacloprid in 66% of samples.

This consultation is good news and hopefully will lead to suitable legislation. In the meantime, pet owners should take care and act responsibly. Try and keep dogs out of water and don't leave pet fur where it can be picked up by birds.

Christine Roe

Pollen Season Lengthening.



Photo: Woodland Trust

The pollen season has increased by at least a week since 1990, because of climate change. Warm weather and high concentrations of carbon dioxide let plants release more pollen, leading to allergic reactions and hay fever. Studies show that birch, alder and olive trees are releasing pollen 2 weeks earlier in 2015-2024 than in 1991-2000.

This is taken from the Lancet Countdown, which tracks climate change and health. It also shows heat deaths and the spread of infectious diseases have increased over the past four decades.

Christine Roe

Nature Notes – Spring 2026

It is windy again (18th April) and feeling quite cold, hope it does not spoil the cherry blossom which is brightening up the area. The spring flowers on the road verges were beautiful, and tulips have now taken over in gardens. Maybe it was the wet winter, but I have more tulips than I had last year even though I did not plant any more. The Camelia, Magnolia, Forsythia and Pieris all put on a good show. We have had a lot of windy days, including Storm Dave (5th April), and the grass verges under the lime trees on Manchester Road were covered in twigs, which were useful for the birds' nesting material.



Photo: RSPB

Magpies and Wood Pigeons have been collecting sticks from my wood pile. The Wood Pigeons are nesting in the Rowan and get most of the sunflower hearts I throw on the lawn before the other birds have a look in. Unfortunately, the lovely moss nest of the Blue Tits, which is tucked into the ivy on the holly, was raided and all the eggs destroyed. This is a tragedy for the tits as they normally only have one brood. I also found two broken Blackbird's eggs on the ground, but this could have been the Blackbird tidying the nest. The leucistic Crows and two Magpies come into the garden every day so they could be the culprits. I also have pairs of Siskins, Dunnock, Collared Doves and lots of Sparrows.

Frogspawn arrived in local ponds in March, although Gillian Drinkwater's arrived a little earlier on 28th February. I put some of my spawn in tanks again and I now have lots of tiny tadpoles swimming around. Some of the spawn died even though it was from the same clump and I am not sure why. Philip Walshaw reports that his frog spawn has disappeared. He has a good-sized pond, and the spawn may have sunk to the bottom, or the tadpoles have swum under plants, or the spawn could have been eaten by newts or dragonfly larvae. There are many dangers for tiny creatures. Hopefully some will have survived.

Roger Kite has Starlings nesting and one sits on the house roof displaying and doing a very good impression of a Buzzard. I have been fooled a few times and so was very pleased to hear and see a pair of Buzzards circling high above the valley today. I have not seen a Sparrowhawk for a while but expect it will make an appearance now it is nesting time. I heard the male Tawny Owl calling last night and Neil Porter heard a pair calling down in the valley on 3rd March.

We started moth trapping again in March. The best count was 10 moths on 21st March. The weather had been a bit warmer the week before with no rain. We had Common Quakers, Hebrew Character, Early Greys and Double Striped Pug, but only one moth, a Hebrew Character, since. Roger Kite saw the Noctule bat on 6th April so maybe it has been feasting on our moths round the moth trap. Butterflies and bees have fared a bit better. I saw my first Garden Bumblebee on 11th February, and numbers have increased steadily since then. Several Mining Bees' nest holes have appeared on the lawn, so I have to be careful where I tread. I saw a Red Admiral on 18th March and since then Peacock, Brimstone, Holly Blue and male Orange Tip butterfly. On 5th March there was an eruption of 7-spot Ladybirds. They were everywhere, crawling up the windows in the porch and stems of plants in the garden. This is a good sign for one of our native ladybirds. I have not seen a Harlequin ladybird yet so maybe the 7-spot ate their eggs.



Photo: Greg Hume - Own work

The Spring flowers and blossoms (including the Dandelions) have helped the early insects to collect enough pollen to feed their future broods. Now it is our turn to plant nectar bearing plants to sustain them through the summer so there are plenty of insects to feed creatures higher up the chain. Also leave a little wild area of long grass.

Look out for our summer visitors coming soon.

Gillian Drinkwater S10 – 2.2.26 – saw a large skein of geese passing over going south.

Sue Shaw S10 – 25.1.26 – on the RSPB birdwatch had Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Magpie, Dunnock, Great Tit, Goldfinch, Crow, Squirrel, Coal Tit, Green Finch and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Sue was also delighted to find a newt in her new pond on the 26.2.26.

Roger Kite S10 – first sighting of Holly Blue on the 13.4.26.

Graham Appleby S10 – on the RSPB birdwatch – Blue Tits popping in and out the bird box, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wood Pigeon, Sparrow, Blackbird, Robin, Magpie, Dunnock, Great Spotted Woodpecker. 26.1.26 – a large flock of Starling landed in a nearby tree. Not been seen since and it was the largest flock seen locally for some time.

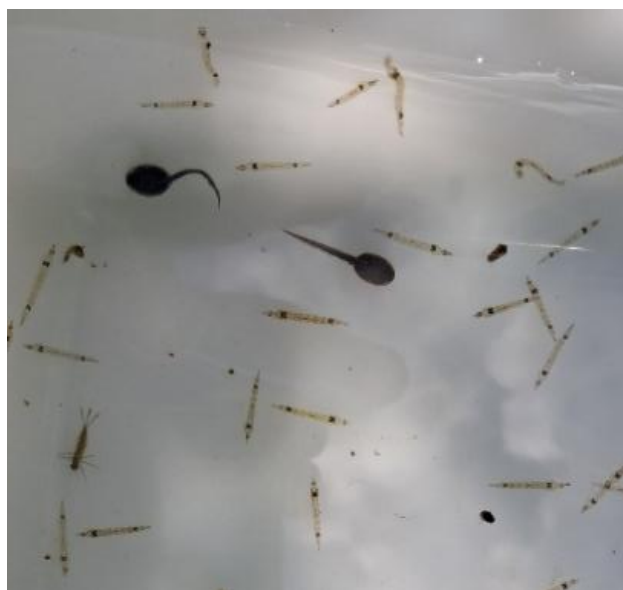
Neil Porter S6 – 13 Curlews in the fields west of Rails Road.

Pauline Higbid S10 – 16.4.26 – an amazing 32 Siskins in her lovely garden. Pauline has a cup of coffee in her garden in the morning, and a friendly Robin joins her. Anyone else got a friendly Robin?

Joan Buckland

Dragons in the Pond!

Our new garden pond was completed last summer and so we were delighted this year to see frogspawn on 17th March and first free-swimming tadpoles 4th April. Now we have wrigglers all over the pond and are keeping fingers crossed that they don't all get eaten before they can turn into frogs!



Having been involved in the Riverfly Monitoring in Rivelin for a couple of years, I was inspired to get a pond dipping kit so we could

find out more about the creatures moving into our new pond. I am used to seeing the Olive Mayfly larvae (the one in the picture with three tails) in the river, but I have never seen Phantom Midge Larvae (also known as glassworms) before. These tiny creatures (less than 1 cm long) are fascinating – they are almost entirely transparent and manoeuvre up and down using four hydrostatic organs (on the photo they look like black dots at both ends). They are predators, feeding on smaller creatures such as water fleas (*Daphnia*), staying in the pond until they transform into the adult flies.



We also caught a nymph of the Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly (*Libellula depressa*), which is common and widespread in southern England and extending its range northwards. Apparently, it may be the first dragonfly to colonise new ponds. These nymphs live in the water for at least a year or, in some instances for as much as two or even three years, depending on water temperature and food availability. In late spring or early summer when fully grown, the nymphs leave the water by climbing up emergent vegetation or partly submerged twigs and then transition into the adult dragonfly.

I'm looking forward to seeing what arrives next and the changes as the pond life matures. If you have a pond and would like to find out what's living in it, I can recommend getting your own dipping kit – fascinating for children and adults alike! I bought a fairly basic kit for about £25, which includes a telescopic net and an identification guide.

Sue Shaw

New RSPB Advice on how to Feed Birds Safely.

Help to stop the spread of disease among garden birds by making two simple shifts to how to feed birds. Put simply: **Feed seasonally. Feed safely.**

1. Feed seasonally

During summer and autumn, there's a higher risk of disease spreading. But it's also when there are more natural foods available to birds, such as seeds and insects.

1 May to 31 October

- Pause filling your bird feeders with seeds or peanuts.
- You can continue to offer small amounts of mealworms, fatballs or suet.

1 November to 30 April

- You can feed your birds a full range of bird foods, including seeds and peanuts.

2. Feed safely

Busy bird feeders can become hotspots for disease. To help keep birds healthy, it's vital to keep things clean.

- **Clean your bird feeders and water baths at least once a week.** Good hygiene is essential. Be sure to also clean away any old food or droppings from beneath feeders.
- **Place your bird feeders in a different spot every week.** This will help to prevent any build-up of potentially contaminated debris underneath. If you have more than one feeder, put them in different areas to reduce the number of birds in one place and the mixing of different species.
- **Avoid putting feeders under places where birds roost, such as under trees.** This will help to avoid contamination through droppings.
- **Don't use bird feeders with flat surfaces, such as bird tables, window feeders and feeders with trays.** Research has confirmed that there's a higher risk of disease spreading on flat surfaces, where contaminated food can collect.
- **Feed in moderation.** Make sure all the food you put out is eaten within one to two days. Adjust the amount you offer based on demand to avoid overfeeding.
- **Keep food as dry as possible.** Damp food allows disease to survive and spread. Choose feeders that prevent rain getting in and limit condensation.
- **Change water in bird baths daily.** Only offer water if you're able to change it every day and make sure it's tap water. A pond is the best way to provide birds and other wildlife with water.

- **Help birds find their own food.** One of the best ways to support garden birds in the long-term is to help them find their own food. So fill your outdoor space with bird-friendly plants – such as sunflowers, teasels and ivy. These help provide natural food sources for birds.

[Adapted from RSPB website by Christine Roe]

Open Meeting 12th February 2026 Portland Works

Paul Iseard kindly returned to the RVCG to give another talk to an audience of about 40 people.



The story started with Robert Moseley who was born in London in 1841 but by 1856 was making scissors in Sheffield. He obviously did well as by 1879 he commissioned the building of the very impressive Portland works on the edge of Sheffield in countryside (now by Bramall Lane Football stadium). This was at a time when more and more industry was moving away from the rivers like the Rivelin and using coal powered steam to drive machinery. The rooms with forges at the new works had no windows, whereas other parts of the factory had extensive and large windows as lighting generally was poor. Moseley's manufacture of cutlery went from strength to strength even exporting to Australia and New Zealand. The company also produce silver holloware of great quality. Harry Brearley and Ernest Stewart used the Portland Works to develop their ideas of stainless steel with the worlds first stainless

steel blade being produced at the Portland Works in 1914. This was originally called *Rusnorstain* and *hygienic steel* among other things.

The works saw a major fire in 1939 which was the start of its decline. Export duties imposed by the US in 1952 hit the company's export market and Moseley's was wound up in 1968. Between 1968 and 2013 the Portland Works was rented out to various trades with no investment, so the fabric of the building declined. Def Leppard used rooms in the building for practicing as Portland Works had forging rights so neighbours could not complain about the noise!

When the building was threatened with turning into apartments, a local group formed and fund raised to save it. This was helped by its Grade 2* listing. In 2013 it was bought for £400,000 and since then volunteers have been working hard to restore it. The Portland Works now boasts 37 tenants ranging from engravers, artists, gin producers to Hackers and Makers. Monthly tours are held for visitors and an annual open day. Visit the Portland works website (<https://www.portlandworks.co.uk/>) for details and for further information on how to support this project.

Mark Bateman

Open Meeting 12th March 2026 The Last of the Little Mesters?

RVCG welcomed back Peter Machan for a talk on the surviving heritage of the Sheffield cutlery industry that he has charted over the last 40 years. Around 44 people turned out on a wild night to hear this excellent presentation. Peter started with his own family history which he had traced to Swann-Morton who employed his father as a partner in the 1950s. Set up in 1932 this works is one of Sheffield great successes producing 1.5m scalpel blades a day for a global market.

The cutlery trade in Sheffield was different to the industries in many other cities as its production was outsourced, with individual items passing through the hands of multiple skilled independent Mesters. It was an immense industry in its time with a lasting legacy in the city. The white aprons and red bandanas of the buffer girls live on with the colours of Sheffield United football club. Buffing itself gets its name from the buffalo leather used on the buffing wheels. Many aspects of production were highly skilled with most serving a seven-year apprenticeship to acquire their trade. Grinding was skilled and hazardous with many dying from exploding stones or grinders asthma. The best grindstones came from Brincliffe Edge and Wickersley as these were very fine-grained sandstones.



Many works built grand buildings although these were mostly one room wide with windows both sides to maximise the light inside. Each successive floor up had smaller windows as the grindstones used on them were smaller and less heavy. Peak production for Sheffield was the 1870s when exports to both the Empire and USA abounded. Then came tariffs, a steady decline and then overseas mass production. Lots of cutlery works were demolished in the 1980s. Despite headlines claiming the death of various last Mesters including Stan Shaw in 2021 the trade is carrying on and Mesters do still exist. These now produce very high end and specialist knives, axes and swords which cannot be mass produced.

Mark Bateman

Task Team

No Task Team News this time. Very wet weather earlier in the year meant cancellations, due to health and safety issues, and Graham Appleby has been away recently on a well-deserved holiday. Normal service should be resumed shortly

The Editors

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