

LOVE OF NATURE

June – July 2024 Newsletter

Thorpe Marsh Nature Reserve: 2nd of April 2024

Twenty members met up with Mick Townsend, our guide for the morning, in Nicholson's farmyard, near Thorpe in Balne before proceeding across the main East Coast railway line into the reserve.

Managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Thorpe Marsh lies on the east bank of the River Don flood plain and occupies an area of lowland grassland with patches of oak and birch woodland. Our walk, which was confined to the raised disused railway embankment because the lower pastures were flooded, afforded us excellent views of the water bodies and centuries old ridge and furrows in the semi unimproved grassland. Thorpe Marsh having never been intensively farmed comprises 10% of that type of habitat in South Yorkshire.

Mick directed us to several bird hides where we also had views across some of the waterbodies. The main body of water was Thorpe Mere, an artificially created pond where we saw greylag geese and tufted duck. Another of the hides afforded views of Applehurst pond which in summer is covered in yellow waterlilies.

Throughout the morning we heard the distinctive sound of chiffchaff and some of us were lucky enough to see one high up in the trees. A small group were even luckier to hear the sound of a cuckoo. Along the embankment there were a variety of trees including oak which was just about to burst into leaf. On one of the trees we found a group of Marble galls induced by gall wasps and some of the willows were bearing male flower buds with maturing pollen sacs.

Mick suggested because of the restrictions caused by recent flooding that the visit be thought of as an introduction to the site and he would be happy to show us more of the reserve at a later date when, hopefully, the lower paths would be accessible. We thanked him for that offer and for sharing his knowledge about the reserve and retraced our steps back over the railway line, grateful for having had the opportunity to visit such an important reserve which has restricted access by car.

Nora Boyle



Thorpe Mere with Mere Scrape in the foreground



Ridges and Furrows



April – May 2024 Newsletter

February 6th 2024

The venue for the February meeting of Love of Nature was Sandall Beat Wood, a designated Local Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific interest, due to the rare insects, such as the Stag beetle, to be found in the wood.

The group met in the Sportsman car park and walked down Armthorpe Rd to enter the wood via Sandall Beat Lane. The first point of interest were the masses of snowdrops growing beneath the brambles.

At the end of the lane we followed the outer edge of the wood taking us along a path which crosses a small area of fen, a remnant of the more extensive fenland which existed before re-forestation which took place between 1809 and 1812. The most obvious dominant plant in the fen is the tall grass, commonly known as Common Reed *Phragmites australis*.

In the 18th century the area which is now occupied by the woodland was a mixture of three habitats: fen, heath and pasture. When the re-forestation of the area occurred in order to produce more timber for ship building, all three habitats were extensively reduced and replaced with a mixed woodland of larch, oak, ash, beech, sweet chestnut, sycamore, lime, Scots pine and elm. Silver birch was already there as part of the heath.

On the Armthorpe side of the fen stands a rather ornate brick building which was built by Doncaster Corporation in 1921 to act as a pumping station to pump excess water from Armthorpe pit into the fen, thus providing the wet conditions necessary to maintain the fenland. Since the closure of the pit, the pumping station ceased to be in operation. Some of our members took a look inside and Karen Williams took a great photograph of the building surrounded by fen.



Pumping Station in the fen by Karen Williams



Birch polypore by Andrea Charlesworth

The majority of the wood was littered with silver birch trunks so we looked for the two most common fungi to be found in a birch woodland, namely Hoof fungus *Fomes fomentarius* and Birch Polypore *Piptoporus betulina*. We weren't disappointed and found several examples of each, mainly on decaying branches on the woodland floor but some on the trunks of trees which were still growing.

Continuing along the path adjacent to the railway line we passed the newly restored railway bridge and the building which originally was occupied by the woodsmen but which now is a Community Environment Centre, open theoretically from 9pm to 3pm. Adjacent to the centre is the sensory garden created in the late 1990s.

On the bird feeding station in the garden of the Centre we saw robin, great tit and blue tit. There were other birds in the wood but often all we saw was a silhouette, making identification difficult.

We passed the children's playground opposite the Centre and stopped for a short while to investigate fungi growing on piles of logs which had been cut down in other parts of the wood and left near to the path we were following. Most of the fungi were brackets and crusts which survive the winter, including the colourful banded Turkeytail *Trametes versicolor* and a creamy white bracket covered in green algae called Lumpy bracket *Trametes gibbosa*.

By now we were about 10 minutes away from the car park at the end of Sandall Beat Road and could see the racecourse through the trees.

We crossed the car park and headed back to the point where we entered the wood near to the Riding Stables, stopping to look at the interpretive sign which illustrated the paths through the wood. Before long we came to the edge of the wood and found ourselves walking up Armthorpe Rd and into the Sportsman where we had arranged to have lunch.

Nora Boyle



Lumpy Bracket covered in algae by Karen Williams



The group looking at fungi by Andrea Charlesworth

January

In the style of Enid Blyton, the January meeting could have been entitled 'Five go Adventuring again'. The weather was dreadful, as it hardly ever stopped raining, but this did not deter the five members from having a wonderful time at Potteric Carr nature reserve, discovering new routes and various fungi along the way. The morning was finished off with a welcome meal at the reserve's café.

Bridget Thompson



December

The Love of Nature group did a return visit to Potteric Carr for its December meeting. The weather had been extremely cold and wet and we were not quite sure what to expect. However, despite restricted access in some parts due to excess water, including some flooding, the group managed to have a walk. This gave the opportunity to look at the interesting plants in the hedgerows and the Hebridean sheep grazing in a field.

The group followed the walk with an enjoyable meal at the Woodfield Farm Pub.

Photos from Potteric: a nearly melted snowman, germinating teasel heads, and last but not least the Group.

Diane Williams





November

In November, the Love of Nature group visited Dearne Valley Old Moor Nature Reserve. Members divided themselves in to two groups and were escorted around the site by two knowledgeable volunteers. We learnt more about the history of the site and it was interesting to hear that this site is now visited by a range of birds that in the past would not normally have been seen in this part of the country. Some of the members stayed for lunch after their guided walk.

Bridget Thompson

October

October's trip was to Idle Valley Nature Reserve, Retford followed by a meal at a local pub.

Action packed photograph of geese flying, followed by a photo of the group including our outrider on the 'all terrain super buggy'. An action photograph was not possible due to the speed of the driver.

Diane Williams



September

September's trip was to Sprotbrough Flash followed by a very enjoyable meal at the Boat Inn.

Diane Williams



October – November 2023 Newsletter

July

We decided to take a stroll around Thrybergh Country Park for our Love of Nature walk on 4th **July**. The weather was kind to us, not completely blue skies, but the sun did make an appearance and was quite warm.

An area in the park has been created, dedicated to the local people who lost their lives in the pandemic, with a commemorative sculpture and places to just sit and reflect.

The 2-mile walk around the lake is lovely, lots of benches to rest for a minute or two and watch the birds and insects. A favourite spot is the bottom corner, feeders have been set up in a copse of trees at the waters edge, where all manner of little feathered friends congregate. There is a very nice cafe overlooking the lake on site and lots of areas for a picnic, but on this occasion we lunched in the Earl of Strafford's sunny conservatory.

Dawn Hobson and Sue Stenton



August – September 2023 Newsletter

Humberhead Peatlands

In **May** the Love of Nature group had a tour of the Peatlands, guided by Janet and Pete from the Trust. We made use of the viewing platform, which overlooks the Peatlands, and walked by the continuing reconstruction of a prehistoric wooden pathway. This pathway is believed to be the oldest in England, although the Somerset Sweet Track is also a contender (one to Google). We then visited the site of a bomber that crashed in the Peatlands in 1941. The crew were Polish airmen returning from a raid over Germany. Four died and two survived. There is a cairn like structure built of plane parts recovered from the crash site.



We were also given a talk on the nesting nightjars and the project that is underway to track the birds' flight paths. This is in order to determine how far and where the nightjars travel which will help develop nightjar conservation strategies. We were offered the opportunity to have an evening visit to see the nightjars. Wetherby u3a recently asked for such a walk and this was provided. However, we were advised that the midges were out in force and protection would be needed. The visit remains on our possible to-do list. Various events happen throughout the year so it is worth keeping an eye on what is taking place nearly on our doorstep.



We continued on our journey, hearing a cuckoo and seeing a doe deer in the distance. The common cotton-grass, which is found growing in peat and acidic wetlands and a very small lizard were among the other interesting flora and fauna.

The Peatlands visit concluded in the 'classroom' where refreshments were provided. This was followed by lunch at the Green Tree.

Finally I would like to remember David Allen, who died earlier this year. David was a regular member of the group and did the write-up for the last visit to the Peatlands.

Diane Williams



Visit to Old Moor April 4th 2023

Our **April** meeting took place at the Dearne Valley RSPB Reserve Old Moor which is a Nature Reserve with a visitor's centre, a sensory garden, 7 viewing hides, 3 walking trails and a café.

Many birdwatching visitors follow the Green trail which passes most of the hides but in the summer, the Red Trail to the left and behind the Visitor's Centre takes you past areas of botanical interest, in particular orchids, and watery habitats where you can see a variety of dragonflies and damselflies.

Old Moor's habitats are managed to attract a variety of wildlife. The reedbeds are cut back periodically to maintain a good mix of open water, wet reeds and dry fen edges which are perfect for bitterns and the grasslands are grazed to create different heights of grass to support the needs of waders such as lapwing, which unfortunately we didn't see today, and overwintering wildfowl such as Canada geese. The reserve works closely with the Environmental Agency to manage the washlands to reduce the risk of flooding to nearby homes. We saw evidence of the new management schemes as we walked round the reserve.

After a short update on the recent changes to the paths open to visitors we proceeded to the open viewing area known as Tree Sparrow Farm. In the short time we were there some of us saw the tree sparrow, robin, great tit and dunnoek.

Turning right at the next junction of paths we headed down the Green Trail towards the large hide on the left of the path which was originally known as the Family Hide. This hide affords brilliant views across the mere where there were large numbers of black-headed gulls in their breeding plumage. Some of the other birds seen from this hide were gadwall, shoveller, pochard and tufted duck. Some of the birds were already in pairs. Gadwall, for instance, were feeding in pairs making it easier, once the male with its black tail was identified, to have a closer look at the female whose most obvious feature is the orange stripe down its beak.

On the way to the other hides we passed numerous blackthorn bushes, some where the flowers were still fresh and others which had already finished flowering. Gorse bushes with their bright yellow flowers were also in the hedgerows.

Following the Green Trail to the end we visited other hides where some of us were lucky enough to see a male and female marsh harrier. These birds, which breed on the reserve, can be spotted year round hunting for prey over the reedbeds below. Also seen, amongst others, were teal, cormorant, shelduck, Canada geese and mute swan.

In one of the hides two birdwatchers had their telescopes focused on a woodpecker perched on a pole at the far side of the reserve and very kindly allowed us to take a look.

On the way back we paused for two photos to be taken by Bridget, and then we went upstairs in the Visitor's Centre to the café. The café was very busy so some members left to try another venue.

The weather was very kind to us and became progressively warmer as the day went on.

Nora Boyle



Our **March** meeting of the nature group was quite different from our usual excursions round the local nature spots and attracted a good turn out of our group members. But first call was not as spectacular as it could have been. We had intended to go to St Mary's church in Kirk Bramwith in February to see the beautiful snowdrop display in the surrounding grounds. However, extensive road works made it impractical and it was put off till March. The flowers made a good display and worth the visit but were slightly past their best.



Our second visit was the Church itself, which is 900 years old. We were greeted by Viv, the church warden with tea, coffee and unexpectedly an array of sausage rolls and cakes. The church is known for its collection of furniture by the 'Mouseman of Killburn', Robert Thompson. His work is known by his signature of a carved mouse on all the items he produced and there were 26 of these on various items in the church, pews, chairs and so on. This led to an extensive search by our members and concluded by the end that we had found 21!

We moved on eventually, enjoying the sunshine, walking alongside the canal. This brought us to our next destination 'The Don Aqueduct'. This unique structure forms a crossroads with the River Don raised above the river itself. After marvelling at this feature we crossed to the other side and back to the village.

Our final call was The Glass House for an excellent meal, all brought out together after only a very short wait.

All in all one of the best jaunts I have had in a while.





Mike Bowser

