



HIGH BATTS NATURE RESERVE

Charity Number 1151676

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2018

News from the Reserve

At the time of writing the Reserve has a covering of 3-4 inches of snow: picturesque in its own way, but a serious challenge to much of our wildlife. Small mammals especially, but also larger mammals to an extent, will struggle to find food under the snow, and keep warm under such conditions. Owls, which feed largely on small mammals, can suffer badly during periods of prolonged snow cover, as their prey is hidden, and the sounds they make, which the birds rely on to locate them, are muffled. The short term forecast is for the weather to become milder towards the end of January, so hopefully no great damage will be done to the balance of predator and prey amongst the Reserve's inhabitants.

One benefit of a covering of snow, at least from the naturalists' point of view, is that creatures which we rarely see, leave evidence of their presence in the form of footprints. All around the Reserve the pristine snow on the day after the snowfall had impressions of the feet of roe deer and foxes. How often do we see these animals? Only occasionally, but the footprints in the snow show they traverse the whole of the Reserve in their search for food. I was however surprised by the number, or rather lack of a number, of rabbit prints. Along the full length of the Ride through the Reserve I saw only one set of rabbit prints in the snow. Contrast that to a decade or so ago, when the entire Reserve was criss-crossed by rabbit prints after a snowfall. Rabbits nationally are declining in numbers; something we would not have thought possible once.

As is to be expected the Reserve's bird feeders are teeming with users at this time of the year. The Pond Hide feeders are attracting good numbers of chaffinches, tree sparrows, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, marsh and long-tailed tits throughout the daylight hours. One or two nuthatches regularly visit, as do up to four great spotted woodpeckers. A few lesser redpolls, gold finches and siskins are starting to use the niger seed feeders. Pheasants, mallards, moorhens and blackbirds are in constant attendance, picking up any food which falls to the ground. Yellowhammers, which always used to start coming on to the feeders at this time of the year, are conspicuous by their absence: only one or two have been recorded. Greenfinches also, once an indispensable attendee at all bird feeders, now seem scarce. Other less usual birds at or around the feeders, seen in the last few weeks, have been goldcrest, reed bunting, jay and tree creeper. Two tawny owls, obviously a pair, are being seen daily in the entrance to the large box visible amongst the trees across from the Pond Hide.

The first signs of spring are appearing at High Batts. Snowdrops are now emerging and starting to flower and the hazels are covered in catkins. The rooks are visiting their nests in the rookery, and smaller birds are making their first attempts at territorial singing. In only a matter of weeks now other plants will appear, and as the days get longer the Reserve will fill with birdsong. Another full blown spring is not far away.

Robert Adams

This newsletter is compiled by David Beeken, who would much appreciate input from the membership at large. Please send any letters, comments or potential contributions to: email: dandk@beeken.plus.com or telephone 01765-600528.

Other News

Open Day, Sunday October 22nd 2017

Despite windy conditions overnight (the marquees needed re-setting first thing) which abated very slowly the autumn Open Day was an outstanding success with a record 158 visitors during the day. Some of the regular activities were missing and our "bat lady" was unwell, but there was more than enough to interest a wide range of ages. Nest box making along with other children's activities including art work at the Hotel Hide were much enjoyed. As ever, the results of small mammal trapping were particularly popular; one young family, having enjoyed seeing the process last year so much, came especially for the tours of the traps and the exciting examination of the contents! We must offer great thanks to Brian Darbyshire who has set and emptied his Longworth traps for so many years, as he is stepping down from this task; so many people now have knowledge of this aspect of the Reserve because of his skill and dedication. Walks around the Reserve telling visitors about the flora and fauna, and explaining the extent of volunteer action in maintaining it to the standards required in an S.S.S.I. were well received, and a Kingfisher again made an appearance for a lucky few observers. Gratitude is also due to the volunteers who had lengthy stints in hides helping with bird identification and the willing 6th Ripon Scouts who assisted with car park stewarding and the dismantling, storing and loading at the end of the day.

Muck-in Morning, 7th October

Raking and stacking the results of the mowing of the sides of the main ride was the principal task for the 11 cheery volunteers on the day, and Colin collected the results to take off-site in the dumper. A break for hot drinks and sustenance in the form of a variety of cakes was again a highlight!

Winter Lectures

Our series of talks commenced on 5th October when Keith Gittens gave us his presentation "Dragonflies of Yorkshire". Despite an initial minor technical difficulty and the fact that our regular large screen was unavailable on the night, meaning a very small screen kept in reserve by Ray Rumbold had to be pressed into service, Keith's talk was so engrossing that these factors were not really noticeable. One significant element in the current scene, as it is for most other orders, was the part the gradual increase in average temperatures was playing in changes in our populations of dragonflies and damselflies. A new 5ft square screen has since been purchased as cover for the non-appearance of the Reserve's large screen when its keeper is unable to attend.

On 9th November Stuart Ward came to relate his experiences of a holiday in Sri Lanka, giving us a fascinating insight into the culture of this large island, interspersed with images of wildlife, particularly birds. It was good to get an appreciation of the diversity of this important island, and there is no doubt that all present appreciated the variety of species on view.

Tom Lawson has visited us several times over the years, and he came again on 7th December with a presentation on the birds encountered during a visit of about 2 months to in the north-west of Australia. Starting at Darwin in the Northern Territories, Tom and his wife explored the various habitats between there and, eventually, Broome in Western Australia. No total count of species was made by those present, but it must have resembled a decent Test Match cricket score!

Summer Bird Feeding

In the April 2017 newsletter we mentioned that, with the agreement of the Trustees, a number of the regular photographers could continue feeding the birds at High Batts throughout the summer months during the period when the Reserve's re-filling is suspended at their own expense. As everyone benefits from this generosity, the Trustees also agreed that a donation box could be placed in the Pond Hide in order to support the photographers in their task but in the event the box did not appear. It is understood that it will appear this year, however!

Diary dates

Winter Lectures

The final 2 talks take place at the usual venue, the Golden Lion Inn, Allhallowgate, Ripon, and commence at 7.30pm; refreshments are available, and the bar is open! On street car parking is possible or nearby in Victoria Grove car park. They are:-

8th February 2018: Pat Rumbold & Colin Slator: "Ice Roads and Gluttons"; winter and summer visits to Finland & Norway.

8th March 2018; Peter Bowman: " The Golden Triangle"; a visit to India.

Looking ahead, Pat Rumbold is working diligently on the programme for the winter 2018/19, and has already fixed the following dates (all Mondays) and arranged speakers as follows:

1st October 2018: Aimee Nicholson, RSPB: "Hen Harriers Life & Project".

5th November 2018: Pat & Ray Rumbold: " A Carpathian Caper".

3rd December 2018: Alistair Peterson will tell us about Alaskan & Coastal Brown Bears plus wildlife & birds in the USA.

In at the Start Project

The project team has been very busy since we got the news in December that we had been selected as one of 6 projects in the UK to compete in the Quarry Life Award. We have contacted and visited many local groups and organisations and have been developing partnerships to allow us to deliver a wide range of activities. North Stainley Primary School is eager to take part, and we will be running sessions at the school and on site, and starting an after-school club in the Spring. North Stainley Parish Council has offered support and practical help in getting information to local people. Site surveying and species monitoring are major elements of the project and we have been mapping the area, developing plans for a circular footpath around the extension so that our accredited survey volunteers can access and record the flora and fauna. With Hansons we will be helping to plant trees at the northern end of the site. Meanwhile we are also planning our public events the first one of which is a Drop-in Session at North Stainley Parish Hall on Saturday 10th February from 10 to 3 with the aim of explaining the project to the local community. Do come along—we would love to see you.

If you can help with any of our activities, whether it is doing a bit of computer work, helping to survey the site, or giving a hand at public events, please get in touch. There is a meeting at St. Wilfrid's Community Centre Ripon on Thursday 25th January at 7.30 for all those interested in helping.



There is a new page on the website explaining about the project and we will be posting news there of all forthcoming events so do not forget to watch. And last but not least, here is the new logo for the project - in black and white here but in colour everywhere else.

Bird Ringing

The East Dales Ringing Group have for several years kindly invited High Batts members to a March session at the Reserve to the extent that it has become rather a tradition. The invitation has again been extended for **Saturday, 31st March commencing at 10am**. This year it has been agreed that in connection with the "In at the Start" project it will also be open to members of the public. Do be aware that weather conditions can affect matters and so it would be wise to check that the event is going ahead by calling Peter Bowman on 07736 232616.

Diary Dates (cont'd)

Other Dates for Your Diary

There are 2 important dates to note. Firstly, the Reserve's A.G.M. will take place on Tuesday 1st May 2018 at a venue to be arranged. Next, The Trustees have agreed that the next Reserve Open day will be on Sunday 3rd June 2018. More information will be available in the April newsletter.

Muck-in mornings

These occasional Saturday morning work parties have created an enjoyable sense of camaraderie as well as the evident benefit to the necessary management of High Batts. Although no further dates have yet been fixed it is expected that by the date of the issue of the April 2018 newsletter it will be possible to plan ahead for repeat performances!

IMPORTANT NOTICES FOR MEMBERS

Terms and Conditions of Membership

It has become necessary to remind all members (including keen photographers) that in subscribing to membership of High Batts you have agreed to abide by the terms and conditions of the Reserve. One important item is the requirement to **keep to the main ride and footpaths**, especially avoiding straying close to the River Ure and Hide Pond. Only those people with authorisation, usually the regular volunteers, engaged in specific management tasks or on monitoring work are permitted to access other areas. If you have organised a group visit, or are simply taking friends or family on a tour of the Reserve, as a member it is your responsibility to ensure that everyone involved is also aware. Not only is there a potential Health & Safety issue, such actions could be construed as breaking the terms of the lease for High Batts. The importance cannot be over-emphasised!

How to report a rarity

If you think or know you have seen a rare bird please contact us by telephone 0793 5352890 or email (highbatts1@gmail.com) before posting this on any of the Bird websites or on social media. High Batts is on private land and near a working quarry and we need to manage any issues which could result from lots of birders trying to access the Reserve.

Species Recording Forms

Mentioning recording and Annual Reports in his letter, the Chairman's words should remind us all that noting observations on the record sheets provided is essential; without this information there is a lack of material for Annual Reports, this popular benefit of membership. Not only that, the data collected feeds into local and national databases which are a vital tool in ongoing scientific studies of all aspects of natural history. **Please allow the time on your visit to note your observations, however insignificant you may believe them to be.** Yes, photographers, this means you too!!

Please be aware that the first batch of Bird Recording Forms unfortunately omitted Reed Bunting from the list so for the time being any recording of this species will be a "write-in". The next batch will, of course, be corrected.

Bird Food Sales

Feeding garden birds is a high priority in the bleak midwinter. Don't forget that Pat & Ray Rumbold hold stock for purchase and collection by prior arrangement, and they can be contacted on 01765 604220. All proceeds go to supporting the Reserve. The prices current at the time of writing are as shown in the September 2017 newsletter but fluctuations do occur and they may change.