

Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter no.18 - December 2014

What have we been doing?

September was a busy month with the information boards on display at the various events.

The [Pinewoods Open Day](#) on Saturday 13th September was followed the next day by attendance at the [Harrogate in Bloom](#) Awards ceremony at the Old Swan Hotel.

Carolyn Rothwell gave a talk to the WI at Harrogate Library on the 18th and Lynda Fussell did the honours for the [Heart Support Group](#) at Harrogate Hospital on the 24th.

There was a chance to get our breath back before the Bugs and Bulbs event at [Starbeck Library](#) on October 18th. As well as making many mini bug hotels and providing a bug hunt trail we were pleased to present our Wildlife Friendly Workplace Award to the Friends of Starbeck Library. [Andrew Jones](#) was on hand to present the award for us. The Friends have worked hard to turn a piece of waste ground beside the library into a haven for wildlife and library patrons alike.



Bug inspection on the Bug Hunt at Starbeck Library

Progress continues in the Wildlife Friendly Garden at Harrogate District Hospital. Carolyn Rothwell and her trusty band of volunteers are planting up now. There is an obelisk in the middle with [Winter Flowering Jasmine](#), [Honeysuckle](#) and [Viburnum Bonantense](#) to brighten up the winter months. [Yellow Acorus](#) have been installed in the boggy corners. Other plants include [dogwood](#), [heathers](#) and [cyclamen](#). For a detailed plant list please visit

Comments and contributions welcomed.

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our website at www.biodiversityaction.org.uk and follow the links from the item on the hospital garden under the [news](#) section.



Meanwhile our **Valley Gardens team** has cleaned out the nest boxes they put up in the spring. They were pleased to report finding 6 out of the 8 boxes had nests in them, mostly blue tits but possibly one great tit which was identified from an egg still in the box. So a good success rate this year.

There was a concerted effort to colonise an area near the Ebor Rise entrance with native wildflowers. We are hoping that by concentrating planting efforts in one area this autumn we will be more successful in combating the grass as well as the Himalayan balsam next year.

Visit our web [gallery](#) for amazing pictures of this year

2015

The annual [RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch](#) will be on the weekend of the **24th and 25th January**. This is a great opportunity for everyone to contribute to a national survey of our birdlife. HDBAG will be at **Starbeck Library on 24th Saturday** from 10am - 12pm. As well as bird counting there will be the usual fun events and refreshments. Hope you can make it.

If you enjoy the one day event then why not consider joining the [British Trust for Ornithology's](#) (BTO) on-going survey called the [Garden Birdwatch](#). You can record what you see in your garden over a morning coffee and then enter your weekly sightings online or by post. The online facility to help identify birds you are not sure of is wonderful. As well as instruction videos, someone will reply to your emails when you include photos and descriptions, with answers to your questions. The data you help build is valuable information for planning conservation for birds and other wildlife. Find BTO at www.bto.org/gbw.

As part of our aim to encourage everyone in Harrogate District to be more wildlife friendly we send you emails of events run by like-minded groups. These are great opportunities to learn more about our area and wildlife in general.

High Batts Nature Reserve near North Stainley is only open to non-members on its annual open day or by special arrangement. What a great day out for all the family it was this November. The fungi trail lead by expert, Adrian Bennett, was fascinating and informative. Despite the 'you should have been here last week' there was so much to see we were out for a couple of hours.



Many sightings of birds and mammals were also recorded. High Batts contact numbers are:

Secretary: 01423 711887 Warden: 07871 744604
Chairman: 07935 352890

The **Harrogate RSPB Group** recently hosted a talk on [Hen Harriers](#) by Blanaid Denman. If you weren't already worried about the extinction of this bird from North Yorkshire and the threat to it in the rest of the country then one evening with this enthusiastic, informative and level-headed person will certainly stir you. If you have the opportunity to hear her speak, do so.

For more information about [RSPB's Skydancer project](#) (including a computer game and a knitting pattern) go to the [RSPB website](#).

Harrogate District Naturalist Society outdoor event on 15th November was a [wildlife friendly garden tour](#). Sandra Mason's garden, where we held our moth morning this year, was one of those visited. For a full description of the tour go to www.hdns.org.uk/news. This is the type of tour we should be doing for HDBAG members to enable them to visit each other's gardens to exchange ideas. Anyone who would like to volunteer their garden, especially if you already have one of our '[Wildlife Friendly Garden Awards](#)', please get in touch.

Around and About

If you are on **Cambridge Street in Harrogate** as it is getting dusk (or on dull days make that 4 o'clockish) look up at the tree in the pedestrian area between Morrisons and Primark. There have been 50 or more [Pied Wagtails](#) gathering there to roost for the night. The busy fluttering and chatting seems to go unnoticed by most passers. These birds are increasingly being found in towns.



Pied wagtail

Out in the countryside, near **Padside**, Crows have been seen pulling cones from the branches of pine trees and flying away with them. The observers have not been able to follow and see what happens next.

It only goes to show how much there is to watch if only you have the time to stop and stare ☺ ☺.

If you have the time to walk **Scargill Reservoir Way** we would be pleased to know what you see. Scargill Pastures is rough grassland and heath surrounding Scargill & Ten acres reservoirs. Following Yorkshire Water's dropping of their windfarm proposals for Scargill Pastures, the North Yorkshire [SINC](#) Panel were asked by a keen local naturalist to look into whether this site of acid grassland/heath might be worthy of designation as a 'Site of Importance for Nature Conservation'. (these are non-statutory local wildlife sites of county-wide importance, which complement the statutory networks of [SSSIs](#). They benefit from a lesser degree of protection than SSSIs but their protection does carry some weight in planning decisions and in targeting of agri-environment schemes etc.). Following this request, the NY SINC Panel commissioned some botanical and breeding bird surveys this year. Apparently, it is botanically very species rich - in patches at least (sundew & bog asphodels etc.) and good for breeding skylarks and waders. The SINC Panel is likely to consider this data later in assessing whether the site qualifies as a SINC. Although we have no systematic data on wintering bird numbers any casual observations may help contribute to the assessment. Sighting details can be sent to us or directly to Dan.McAndrew@harrogate.gov.uk.



Season's Greetings



Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

Litter and our wildlife

I'm writing this in the gloom of yet another misty, damp day - not a day for embarking on much in the garden. Just as well then that our style of gardening means we try to leave habitat undisturbed over the winter and save most of our cutting back until early spring. It's part of our plan to consider the wildlife around us on our patch in everything we do, and factor in its needs.

If only others would do the same. On several occasions recently I've been left reflecting on the litter problem and its effects on not just us humans but the wildlife around us. As vegetation dies back in autumn it reveals an ever growing collection of plastic bottles, cans, take-away trays etc. on our verges, in and around many people's gardens, on our carefully restored nature reserves, and even, in the case of dog poo, hanging from trees in little plastic bags. This is not just a problem of visual aesthetics but can be damaging to our wildlife. Take plastic bags: not only can animals get caught up in them and suffocate, but I have found a clutch of eggs in one before now, abandoned because I presume the bag was moved by the wind and the bird couldn't resume sitting. We are often warned about ring pulls from cans and that even the rubber bands the postman drops can be mistaken for worms by birds and mammals. But are we all as aware as we should be of the dangers of our litter? For example, it was only when looking at the Internet while pondering this piece that I was made aware of the problems of balloons and sky lanterns being mistaken for food when they come back down to earth and subsequent problems they cause. Please look at the Marine Conservation Society website, www.mcsuk.org, for more information on their [Don't Let Go](#) campaign.

The [RSPCA](#) website reports that they receive over 7,000 calls on litter related incidents per year, but they think the real figure must be much higher.

Among problems listed are a badger cub with its head trapped in a plastic can holder, a hedgehog with its head wedged in an empty tin and a fox cub with its head caught in an abandoned wheel hub. They also have some useful tips on how to dispose of rubbish safely, such as cutting the plastic rings from packs of cans, tying plastic bags in a knot, cutting up balloons and washing and squashing cans.

Equally not many people seem to think about the possible consequences of their actions.

Walking by the river Ure with friends we came upon a gull in its death throes entangled with nylon fishing wire hanging from a tree branch over the river. There was nothing we could do to rescue it at that point but one couldn't help but wish that the fisherman responsible had made more effort to disentangle the wire in the first place and avoid that distress. I'm sure if he had thought about that possibility he would have done, as not many people actively want animals to suffer.

We were in Scotland in October the week that the 5p charge for bags was introduced. It was fascinating to gauge reaction and to watch coverage in the media. It seemed that a good number of people were outraged at the idea of being charged for a single use bag and yet the TV coverage also showed the scale of the litter problem in some of the estuaries, the millions being spent on having to clear it up and the effect on animals and birds, especially sea birds. When the charge is introduced here next year I expect similar uproar and I wish that more was being done to prepare people and explain the reasons. How about a few graphic photos on the supermarket walls next to the checkout?

I'm wondering what I can do as a wildlife supporter and member of HDBAG. Should I download some pictures from the Internet and carry them around with me so I can explain why I am in favour of this charge, even a ban on such bags? Should we as a group be more visible and vocal on this issue? What do other supporters think?

Janice Scott