

Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter no.19 - February 2015

What have we been doing?

The annual RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch was a joint effort with [Starbeck in Bloom](#) at the [Starbeck Library](#) this January. Birds seen are listed on our website. The birds and attendees may be variable but the welcome and refreshments in the library are always spot on.

Weekly logging of garden birds has indicated the less severe winter so far has meant regular visitors are not as dependent on garden feeders as in bad years. The colder spells of weather have enticed some of the winter visitors to our gardens though not in such large numbers.

For help identifying birds our local contact is Mike Brown, BTO Regional Representative for Yorkshire-Central. phone: 01423 567382, mobile: 07900 301112, email: mikebtorep@gmail.com

Getting ready for spring and the year ahead some members have cleaned out the nest boxes in our area of Valley Gardens. Many thanks go to Bill Sturman for his expert advice.



In our August 2014 issue we reported a volunteer program that Sam Walker, Countryside Ranger with Harrogate Borough Council was initiating. Some members have already joined his team of volunteers and have worked at Rossett Nature Reserve and Hell Wath (near Ripon).

If you are free on a Friday from 10 – 3 why not contact Sam at sam.walker@harrogate.gov.uk and find out more.

Visit our web [gallery](#) for more pictures

Comments and contributions welcomed.

Please contact Pamela Millen:-

✉ biodiversityaction@gmail.com

☎ 01423 523233

AGM

**Saturday 7th March, Bramall Learning Centre,
RHS Garden Harlow Carr**

1.30pm for guided bird walk

2.15pm meeting

1. Welcome
2. Matters arising from minutes of last AGM 25th March 2014
3. Chair's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Election of committee
6. Guest speakers

Mitigation for Biodiversity and the Planning System

Presented by **Dan McAndrew**, Rural Strategy Officer, Harrogate Borough Council

A panel will then answer questions and provide insights to the various aspects of planning application, considerations and approval in terms of supporting local biodiversity based on their experiences with the planning system.

Panel includes:-

Andrew Jones, MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough

Heather Jackson, local home owner modernising a rural property

Andrew Willocks, wildlife gardener at RHS Harlow Carr

Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Master Plan

Proposals on the future plans for the development of Harrogate town centre can be found on the Harrogate Borough Council website www.harrogate.gov.uk.

It is an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre and shows designs to 'improve the visitor experience and encourage more people to visit'. Included is a survey of the views of 100 town centre businesses and 300 shoppers. There will be a consultation period later in 2015 when we can make suggestions to help make wildlife welcome in our town.

In our last newsletter we mentioned the Pied Wagtails roosting in Cambridge Street. Can we encourage more species such as Swifts in the summer by building in swift boxes to new structures?

Nature and Wellbeing Act

The RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts have joined together in a campaign – **Act for Nature** – to raise the awareness of the general public and politicians to the need to stand up for nature.

The Nature and Wellbeing Act is a proposed piece of legislation to bring about the recovery of nature in a generation, for the benefit of people and wildlife. The proposals have been drafted by The Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB and are supported by partner organisations.

On their websites, www.wildlifetrusts.org and www.rspb.org.uk, they set out their reasons and how we can all be involved.

The [Wildlife Trust](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org) explain why we need this act:

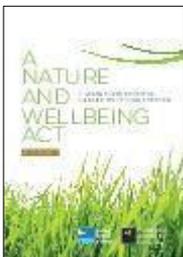
We need nature – but our relationship with it is in trouble.

We need legislation that supports and scales up individual action for nature.

Nature matters to all of us, but the loss of wildlife is continuing at an alarming pace. 60% of our key species are in decline, as is our own health and wellbeing. The two things are linked. And changing a policy here and there won't be enough to halt the loss and start the recovery. So together with the our partners and the support of people like you, we're calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act – to put nature at the heart of how our country is run, ensuring everyone enjoys the benefits it provides in our everyday lives. This is a 'Big Ask' – but if we don't start asking, we won't get the change that nature and people need.

The Act would put nature at the heart of how decisions are made about health, housing and other development, education, economic growth, flood resilience and every community. It would ensure for instance that local and national 'ecological networks' are mapped out and created to put wildlife habitats back into the landscape.

Over 90% of people recently surveyed agreed that our wellbeing and quality of life is based on nature and biodiversity. We need that message to reach our politicians so please join our campaign & ask your MP to Act for Nature, and call for a Nature and Wellbeing Act in their Party's election manifesto.



[Nature and Wellbeing Act – Summary](#)

[Nature and Wellbeing Act – Green Paper](#)

Indoor Meetings

Before the clocks change and field meetings are more viable, here are some indoor talks being presented in March and April.

Harrogate District RSPB Local Group

Monday 9th March – Wildlife and conservation at Tophill Low by Richard Hampshire

Monday 13th April – Birds of the Yorkshire Dales National Park by Ian Court

Meetings are at Christ Church Hall, Harrogate, starting at 19.30. Admission fee is £3 for members and £4 for non-members.

Harrogate District Naturalists' Society

Wednesday 18th March – Ring Ouzels of North Yorkshire by Ken Hutchinson

Meetings are at St. Robert's Centre, Robert Street starting at 19.30. Admission for non-members is £3.

Horticap

With Spring fast approaching thoughts turn to getting back out into the garden. A stroll around someone else's wildlife garden stirs the imagination.

As life returns to the garden why not visit [Horticap](#) at Bluecoat Nurseries, Otley Road, HG3 1QL during the next couple of months. Shop and tea room are open from 10am – 4pm. Every penny made goes back into the charity, helping adults with learning disabilities train in horticulture.

The wildlife garden is situated at the heart of the nursery and now extends to approximately three quarters of an acre and has been developed by the students over 10 years.



Whilst developing the garden the aim has been to provide a wide range of habitats for resident and visiting wildlife with the development of a good sized pond and wooded area. This has been so successful that a wildlife area extension to the garden has been developed to include a wider range of fauna and flora habitats.

Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

Reasons to be cheerful

Much as I love our changing seasons, February can be a hard month to cope with: the landscape looks bleak and washed out, there can be a damp cold that gets into your bones and makes even the garden uninviting. We've had enough of winter, but will spring ever come?

No good to huddle inside either, certainly not with TV or newspapers for company. In the wider world it seems to be an endless recital of man's atrocities towards his fellow man, while on these shores there seem to be yet more atrocities proposed upon our natural world. By this I mean the prospect of fracking, and the habitat destruction that would result.

At a time when we are supposed to be aware of habitat loss and the need to focus on our biodiversity and halt / reverse further decline in our wild flowers and insect populations, so vital for our food crops apart from anything else, WHY are we considering for one moment such a thing as fracking and the landscape disruption that this would entail? Consider the skylark, a threatened farmland bird. If skylarks are found to be nesting in the field that is to be drilled, will the companies involved hold off for the sake of this small nesting bird? Will it ever return when the companies have moved on? Will the skylark become simply a bird mythologised in nineteenth century poetry or the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams? What about the ancient hedgerows that still remain? Will they be grubbed up to allow access for the heavy machinery required? How do you restore an ancient native hedgerow? Not to mention the patches of wild flowers around, of which we are always reading that there ought to be more.

I will be honest and say that a few days ago the thought of all of this plunged me into a very dark place where I questioned the point of the work I do for wildlife, albeit in a very small way, and the *raison d'être* of the HDBAG. Should we, so to speak, pack up and go home?

But this was no good. I can't stay hidden under the blankets all day. I had to find something to change my mood and make me fight on. As usual for me it was the very thing I am fighting for that worked. I went for a walk in our lovely local countryside and relished the sight of four buzzards wheeling around in the morning sky. I heard my first curlew of the year. I went out on my own patch in search of the catharsis of weeding and clearing. I came back in, re-invigorated. The snowdrops and aconites are in delightful flower (so any early bees will be okay!), the pheasants around look glorious in their rich brown spring plumage, the sparrows are gossiping lustily in the glossy green foliage of the *prunus lusitanica*, and the blackbird has started to serenade us. I have found my reasons to be cheerful and to fight on.



Like many people I have had some very difficult moments during my life and it seems to have been the natural world that has rescued me each time. I feel I have a great debt to repay.

Perhaps we all need to examine why our actions to support biodiversity are important to us. Am I alone among supporters of HDBAG in thinking and feeling this way? Just how much does our natural world matter to us?

Janice Scott