



FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Registered Charity No. 1070744

Summer 2019



4th Leeds Birdfair

With low pressure dominating throughout the month right up to and including 20th June the chances of getting a dry and windless day on Saturday 22nd seemed somewhat remote. However, a rare spell of high pressure which lasted just three days gave us a dry, warm and very pleasant day with just a light breeze - ideal both for erecting gazebos and bringing in large numbers of visitors.

For the first time, thanks to our local farmer, we were able to use part of the farmland behind the car park for additional parking and this helped to reduce the amount of traffic along the entry road considerably.



The Birdfair provides a great opportunity for birdwatchers to get together and meet old friends but there were also plenty of activities for all members of the family, the Small Mammal Survey being the first at 9.00am. This was followed by a Moth Trap Opening, Bug Hunt, Bird Walk, Rope Making, Barn Owl Pellet

Dissection, Dragonfly Making and the ever popular Pond Dipping.

There was an excellent barbecue to enjoy and a wealth of home baking was available in the Visitor Centre.

A visit to the Fish Pass at 3.00pm was the first guided walk here in 2019 and gave many visitors a chance to see this for the first time. There was also a lot going on at the Dragonfly Ponds but more about that on the next page.

We are grateful to the many exhibitors who supported the event and from the very positive feedback that was received following it we can look forward to the 5th Leeds Birdfair in 2020. Special thanks must, of course, go to Linda Jenkinson of Start Building whose vision it was to have such an event in Leeds and who was able to attract so many high profile concerns to support it again this year and to our own volunteers for all their hard work.



Dragonfly Hotspot

At this year's Annual Birdfair, Rodley Nature Reserve was recognised as a 'Dragonfly Hotspot' by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). As in previous years the Yorkshire Branch of the BDS had a stand organised by Keith and June Gittens. In addition, in view of the award, there was a stand supported by the National Society and we were delighted to have present former Treasurer Brian Walker, Conservation Officer Eleanor Colver and Conservation Outreach Officer Fiona McKenna. Both stands were kept busy throughout the day with lots of children making pipe-cleaner and clay dragonflies. There was also a board featuring dragonflies with holes cut in it so that children (and adults) could have their photographs taken. In recognition of our award, the BDS is presenting the Reserve with a dragonfly information board which, when it is delivered, will be cause for another celebration for its unveiling.

The dragonfly session in the afternoon down at the dragonfly ponds was very well attended. Fiona gave a short speech about Dragonfly Hot Spots and why Rodley NR was being awarded this accolade, i.e. the number of dragonfly species at the Reserve (18 have been recorded most of which are resident), the ease of access for the public to see damselflies and dragonflies and watch their behaviour, and also because of the expertise on hand

to help the public recognise the different species present. After this Fiona joined Peter Mill for the remainder of the afternoon identifying damselflies and dragonflies for the visitors and catching a few damselflies so that these amazing insects could be seen up close. Holding them carefully by their wings does no harm and, following capture, they remained still for a few moments so that keen photographers could get their 'close-ups'.



It was ideal 'dragonfly weather' and we saw large numbers of Azure Damselflies; also plenty of Large Red Damselflies, Blue-tailed Damselflies and Banded Demoiselles. The males of the Banded Demoiselle caused great excitement with their showy displays. Further entertainment was provided by two Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies whose speed and change of direction was amazing. Later in the afternoon a Brown Hawker dragonfly made an appearance, giving a total of six species for the day. Everyone agreed that it was a great success and the consensus of the BDS members present was that Rodley NR is the ideal Dragonfly Hot Spot.

Sand Martins Bounce Back

Sand Martins are summer visitors to the UK and they are one of the first spring migrants to appear, usually around mid-March. The first Sand Martin arrived on 20th March this year and by 22nd April 100 nest holes had been excavated in the nesting bank on the Lagoon. A count carried out a month later revealed 176 holes.



Since its first year in operation the nesting bank has been amazingly successful.

Year	Nest holes
2015	167
2016	186
2017	145
2018	88
2019	176

Sand Martins typically nest in sandy riverbanks and there are colonies along the River Aire but they are vulnerable to rising river levels and summer floods. Here

on the Lagoon they are at least safe from this problem.

But what happened in 2018 and why was there such a drop in numbers? It seems the weather in March was almost certainly to blame. The so called “Beast from the East” brought sub zero, strong, bitterly cold, easterly winds and snow on 1st - a good five inches here at Rodley. This was followed by the “Beast from the East Mark 2” later in the month and many African migrants almost certainly stopped short in mainland Europe and never reached us due to the hostile conditions.

Four of five white eggs are laid in the nest chamber and the birds will usually raise two broods each summer.

Calendar Competition

The winning entry in this year’s children’s calendar competition is by Lily Rose Millen (age 10). Lily’s drawing of a bumblebee on a thistle was the judges favourite and will be included in the 2020 calendar.

A big thank you to all the children who submitted drawings and paintings. Visitors will be able to see all the entries on the display board in the centre this summer. It is planned to run a similar competition next year.

Another New Path

Work on the new hard path between the Reedbed Hide and Dragonfly Ponds was completed last month. This is a 200 metre long stretch of path which will make access along here much easier, particularly for wheelchair users.

A big thank you goes to our volunteers for all the hard work they have put in on this project. A big thank you too to the Co-op Community Fund for making the project possible.



Harvest Mice

A further release

A further release of Harvest Mice was carried out at a site near the Lagoon on 24th May. A total of 75 mice - 42 males and 33 females - were put into "soft release" pens where they are kept for a period of two weeks to acclimatise. During this time they are fed and provided with water and then the tiny doors are opened to enable the mice to leave and explore.

We are grateful to Pudsey Park for their support with the Harvest Mouse Introduction Project and for providing 50 of the mice on this occasion. The Project started in 2012 and since 2014 mice have been released at a number of different locations around the Reserve. The discovery of three nests by the Dipping Ponds and two at the eastern end of the Wet Grassland last year was a positive sign that the population is now spreading out to other areas of the Reserve. In June this year 12 small mammal live traps were set near the Lagoon and six Harvest Mice were caught including three pregnant females and a juvenile - another positive sign that they are doing well here.



To further assist the spread of these tiny mammals a wide border has been sown with specially selected plants at the western end of Tim's Field this year and it is hoped this will provide good nesting habitat later in the year.

The Importance of Bees

It has been estimated that one third of the human food supply depends on insect pollination, much of it done by bees. However, there has been a general decline in many bee species across Europe in recent times and this is almost certainly down to a number of factors which include loss of habitat, the use of toxic pesticides, disease and climate change.

Agricultural changes to more intensive farming methods has contributed to the loss of 98% of our flower-rich grassland since the 1940s. Wildflowers are a vital source of food for bees and here at Rodley we are doing our best to introduce more species to help the bees but it hasn't been easy. Due to the very fertile nature of the soil strong growing grasses dominate and swamp any smaller species. Yellow Rattle helps but it is a slow process.



The Bee Garden replaced the Sensory Garden some years ago and the main purpose has been to grow bee-friendly plants in controlled conditions where

visitors, particularly children can appreciate and learn about the many species of bee that visit the garden and how important they are to our wellbeing. We use as many wildflowers as possible but a few cultivated species are also included where they are known to be particularly bee-friendly, notably Garden Catmint.

A few flowers are “must haves” as they are magnets for bees. These include Wild Mignonette, Marjoram, various Comfreys, Borage, Field Scabious and Viper’s Bugloss - the last one being by far the most popular in the Bee Garden. It is only a biennial but it self seeds very easily and we have had a wonderful display of it in the raised bed in the Bee Garden this year.





Spring Bird Walk

International Dawn Chorus Day is held on the first Sunday in May each year and this year it fell on Sunday 5th May. More than eighty different countries have taken part over the years as it is the perfect opportunity to experience the wonders of nature as people gather to listen to the song of hundreds of birds.

We wanted to give you the opportunity for an early morning walk around the Reserve lead by local birder, John Cooper with some of our volunteers. And you didn't disappoint us - at 8.50am (not quite dawn), over seventy of you walked into the reserve, armed with binoculars - a wonderful sight!

It was a calm day, the sun shone and we had a wonderful morning watching, listening and delighting in the sounds of nature and celebrating our resident birds and Summer migrants. Many children came too with their own binoculars and cameras. All had a good time and we found lots of bugs too!

Afterwards over a warm cuppa and cake, you gave us some lovely feedback: - "We will come again next year", "lovely, informative bird walk - we'll be back!", and "came on spring bird walk - lovely! Thank you to all concerned".

Our next event for families will be our Nature Quest Day on Saturday 27th July. Come and be a Wildlife Explorer for the Day and take part in a fun-filled day of wildlife activities.

Details are on our website, Facebook page and our notice boards at the reserve. We hope you will continue to support us.

Denese Swann.

Events Co-ordinator

Mobility Scooters

We have recently had a very nice second-hand mobility scooter donated to the Reserve and it has been fully serviced. We now have two such scooters available for visitors who need assistance to get round the Reserve. There is no charge for this facility but you do need to book a few days in advance. This can be done by telephoning the Visitor Centre on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays during open hours - 0113 2040441.

Rodley Nature Reserve Events
Summer/Autumn 2019

Nature Quest Day	Saturday 27th July 10am - 3pm	A full day of wildlife activities for all the family	Visitor Centre area and around the Reserve
Bat Night	Saturday 27th July 8.45pm	Walk round the reserve to look for bats and listen to them on our bat detectors	Meet at Visitor Centre Booking Essential
Summer Fair	Saturday 17th August 11am	Our annual Summer Fair with many stalls, BBQ, tombola and much more	Near the Visitor Centre
Amazing Moths	Saturday 24th August 10am	Join Dave Nesham to open the moth trap set the previous evening	Near the Visitor Centre
Bat Night	Saturday 21st September at 7pm	Walk round the reserve to look for bats and listen to them on our bat detectors	Meet at Visitor Centre Booking Essential

Reserve Opening Times
Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday 9am - 5pm (4pm Nov- end Feb)
Visitor Centre Opening Times - 10am - 4pm
Telephone No on open days - 0113 2040441

For Rodley Nature Reserve Trust Matters:

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Website: www.rodleynaturereserve.org