



Registered Charity No. 1070744

FRIENDS OF RODLEY NATURE RESERVE NEWSLETTER

Spring 2021



Male Orange Tip butterfly feeding on dandelion

Latest News

Following a further government announcement on 4th January to introduce a national lockdown the decision was taken to close the Reserve again with immediate effect and suspend all non-essential volunteering activities. This was done after a great deal of consideration and after further risk assessment.

Following the Government's Roadmap guidance and an easing of restrictions the Reserve grounds were able to be re-opened from Wednesday 31st March but again only on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons from 1pm to 5pm and with just one toilet available. The Visitor Centre remained closed but from Wednesday 14th April a sales table was set up in the doorway to provide hot and cold drinks and a limited range of merchandise and bird seed from 1pm to 4.30pm.



Regular visitors Frances and Peter enjoying a hot drink - photo by Denese Swann

Following further advice from DEFRA received via the RSPB it will not be possible to open some of the enclosed viewing hides as we had previously planned but this will be kept under regular review.

Fortunately, one big project that was able to go ahead in March was the Duck Marsh development. You can read more about this overleaf.

Under Step 4 of the Government's Roadmap - no earlier than 21st June - it is hoped that all legal limits on social contact can be removed and the increased protection offered by the vaccine will gradually replace the restrictions with the Roadmap providing the principles of the transition.

Sadly, it is still too early for us to be planning our usual large events this year and both the June Birdfair and August Summer Fair have been cancelled. It may be possible to consider some smaller events later in the year. We are now starting to receive enquiries about pond dipping on open days and this is not available at the present time. It is, however, hoped we may be able to resume public pond dipping on a limited and supervised basis later this year.

The safety of our visitors and volunteers remains paramount and the Trust will keep the situation under constant review. Should the situation change it may be necessary to consider further appropriate measures.

Visitors must continue to observe Government advice. Social distancing must be applied at all times and wear face coverings where this may be difficult and where you may come into contact with people outside your group.

We ask our visitors to be considerate and allow each other the time and space to enjoy the Reserve.

Great Crested Grebes



These birds only spend part of the year with us and the first one usually arrives on the Lagoon in February. The first one this year was seen on 18th February and on 28th February two more birds arrived, one of these a sub-adult which quickly moved on. The two adults were observed displaying the same day. This species usually builds its floating nest near the water's edge in emergent vegetation and in the past the far side of the middle island on the Lagoon has been a popular first choice.

However, in March the birds started to construct a nest out in open water attached to one of the buoys that the tern rafts are usually moored to. This seemed a risky strategy as the very obvious nest seemed to be an open

invitation to marauding larger gulls and could be prone to wave action in windy conditions. But it worked and at the end of the month two of the three tern rafts were very carefully launched and moored to the remaining buoys either side of the nest with the birds still in residence.

The eggs take between 27 and 29 days to hatch and there is an extended hatching period of up to seven days for a clutch of four eggs. The chicks leave the nest within a few hours of hatching and at this young age the parents often carry them on their back, making them surprisingly difficult to spot. At the time of writing two young had been spotted on the back of one of the adults but there could be more.

Manager's Garden



When we can finally open the hides again visitors will get a surprise when they go into the Manager's Garden hide. Gone is the small overgrown pond to be replaced by a new, much larger pond which will hopefully prove attractive to birds, mammals and even a few dragonflies.

We are grateful to Yorkshire Water for supporting this project under their 5 Year Biodiversity Enhancement Programme.

Duck Marsh Development



View from Willow Path Hide prior to work starting

In our Winter Newsletter we revealed plans for a major development on the Duck Marsh. It had been planned for contractors to start on site mid January but with the area forming part of a flood plain several permissions needed to be obtained from the Environment Agency before work could commence. Once these had been received work got underway and machinery moved on site on 8th March. The project took a little over two weeks to complete and the area had been filled with water from the Lagoon by the end of the month.

Water levels will be varied throughout the year. In the winter months only the gravel covered islets will be exposed but in May levels will be dropped slightly to reveal fresh mud.

With its spits, islets, varying water depths and larger area of water it is hoped that this new wetland area will be more attractive to wading birds such as Little Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpipers, both of which have declined here over recent years. Interestingly, the first two Little Ringed Plovers were seen on one of the islets on 3rd April and a Common Sandpiper was seen just in front of the Willow Path Hide on 11th April.

Other waders such as Lapwings, Snipe and Oystercatchers are already taking interest in the gravel covered islets and it is hoped the islets will also provide an alternative nesting option to the rafts on the Lagoon for Common Terns.





View from Willow Path Hide

The larger gulls can be a problem for birds nesting on the wetlands and two Lesser Black-backed Gulls that took a liking to one of the islets were not welcomed by the Lapwings. However, one keen-eyed birdwatcher on the canal tow path picked out and photographed a Yellow-legged Gull there in April - this a new bird for the Reserve.

One thing that will be apparent once we are able to re-open the Willow Path and Duck Marsh Hides is how much more wetland area can be seen and, as regards the Willow Path Hide, how much closer to the hide the water now comes.

Inevitably, our birdwatchers will have their own names for this new and very different wetland area. However, for the time being at least it will continue to be known as the Duck Marsh as the cost of reprinting all our leaflets and changing the website would be prohibitive - and the ducks themselves are not exactly averse to it.

As we said in the Winter Newsletter, this project was made possible thanks to the generous support of Yorkshire Water under their 5 Year Biodiversity Enhancement Programme and we must take this opportunity again to thank them for both their investment and technical assistance without which this development would not have taken place.



View looking towards Duck Marsh and Willow Path Hides

Weirs on the River Aire

Like many other rivers that run through large cities the River Aire has suffered from more than 200 years of industry. We know that Atlantic salmon were still being caught in the river below Bradford in the early 1800s but by 1825 the river was practically devoid of life and remained so for more than 100 years.

Pollution was a major problem but the weirs that powered the many mills also prevented fish from moving up river to their spawning grounds in the upper reaches. The river has 34 major weirs along its 114km length. Fish passes have been installed on many of these weirs including here at Rodley and under the DNAire project another four were being constructed at Armley, Newlay, Kirkstall and Saltaire.

Heavy snow on the night of 1st February this year was followed by a rapid thaw. This followed a very wet January and saw the River Aire running very high. The following weekend the weir downstream of the Reserve at Newlay partially collapsed under the pressure of water.



The partial collapse of the Newlay weir has affected the river level downstream of the Rodley weir quite dramatically and this has been particularly noticeable thanks to a very dry April. The following photograph was taken from the River Path on the Reserve. Where there were once deep glides there are now rippling shallows.

It is worth looking out for birds like Grey Wagtail, Common Sandpiper and even the elusive Dipper at the moment on the rocky riverside.



Remedial work is currently ongoing at Newlay and it remains to be seen what the future holds.

Peacock Butterfly

Look out for their caterpillars on the leaves of Common Nettle on the River Path in May and June.

They can be told from the caterpillars of Small Tortoiseshell, which also uses Common Nettle, by their blacker, white speckled bodies and their much longer spines which act as a deterrent to predators.



Day-flying Moths

We know that most moths fly at night but there are some that fly by day and some of them are very striking. One that fits this category perfectly is the Cinnabar.



This species has a long period of emergence (from mid-May) and so newly emerged moths can be seen at the same time as the fully grown larvae or caterpillars. The larval foodplant is Common Ragwort which is a common plant on the Reserve. However, we do have to remove it from the meadows which are cut for hay as it contains toxins which can be harmful to livestock. A good place to look for the black and yellow barred caterpillars is on Ragwort on the River Path.



The Six-spot Burnet is one of two similar species of moth found on the Reserve and the most likely one to be seen. It could be confused with the Cinnabar at first glance but it has much narrower forewings and is more thickset. It flies from late June to August and visits flowers such as thistles and knapweeds.



This is a moth of flowery grassland and the larval foodplant is Common Bird's-foot Trefoil. A walk along the cut paths on Mike Fisk Meadow offers the best chance of spotting one.

The micro moth *Pyrausta aurata* is another day flyer. It may be small but it is certainly very striking. It is also known as the Mint Moth as the larval foodplants include various species of mint.



Here on the Reserve it uses Wild Marjoram, a plant which was introduced to the Bee Garden some years ago because of its value as a bee plant. It was subsequently planted on the Butterfly Bank and at various other sites round the Reserve. This beautiful little moth can be found between April and early September wherever Wild Marjoram is growing.



Common Sandpiper - one of the first waders to visit the new Duck Marsh
Photos by Barbara Murphy unless otherwise shown

Important Notice

The Reserve opening times shown below are subject to change at short notice due to the pandemic and Government restrictions. Please check our Facebook and Website for the current position before planning a visit

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