



WINTER 2023 NEWSLETTER

WE ARE 5 YEARS OLD!!

What an achievement! 5 years ago Andrew McKeon and River Six had a drink in a pub and thought 'what if we could make Otley more wildlife friendly?' Danny Hudson soon joined them to help with a bit of structure and supporting the finance process and the little group started.

5 years on we have gained charity status, have 12 super active Trustees, a growing membership of over 250 strong and a great community of volunteers.

Many small ideas, such as this, start with a burst of enthusiasm but fizzle out before they achieve anything, as in the early years they often experience some knocks - but we've remained consistent and resilient through this - even managing the Covid pandemic with the challenges that brought - and feel in a really strong position heading into 2024.

We've held a couple of members and volunteers social events this year and would encourage you all to pop to one of our member meetings and feel really welcome to get involved a bit more if you have the time. Thank you for your continued support and especially to those of you who spend some time actively volunteering - however small, every little contribution helps.

Here's to the next 5 years!



YOUR NATURE RECOVERY PLAN



Progress towards the goals set out in our Nature Recovery Plan for Otley has continued. Including expanding our community orchard planting, developing wildlife corridors with wildflower seeds and native bulb planting and much more.

We have had another busy Autumn season, revisiting many of the sites we have already improved for wildlife and added even more. Above is a map of where we have been! Our aim is to provide linked-up wildlife corridors through Otley.

The BT Openworld Meadow was one of our first interventions, and has been a great success, we have had overwhelming positive feedback from the residents of Otley. We returned this year to remove the grass cuttings and disturb the ground, ensuring another year of colour come Spring.



Volunteers at the BT Openworld Meadow

An area of St Martin's Field became our third community orchard, thanks to our budding collaboration with Leeds City Council Parks. To see us hard at work caught on camera, scan the QR code or got to our website [here](#).



We also began to build more wildlife corridors through the well used Grove Hill Park, we planted a line of fruit trees, agreed with LCC to buffer their woodland planting there. We also planted hundreds of seeds and bulbs to aid our pollinators and prickly hedgehog friends make their way through the park, whilst also boosting the parks beauty and value for us people!

We haven't yet been able to return to the Parish Churchyard but nature and others have been doing some good stuff; our wild flower strips on the south side of the Churchyard made a good show this summer, particularly for ox eye daisies. In July after the warmest June on record, ten students from Prince Henry's School watered them and the planted fruit & rowan trees. In autumn the long wild flower stems were cut back, revealing new growth underneath and overwintering ladybirds. The 150 year old willow tree, voted Otley's favourite, has a honeybee nest in one of its cavities.

In November, 18 volunteers pruned back shrubs and ivy by the south wall and paths. A variety of birds came to feed from the exposed soil. After the work is complete before spring , 5 new bird and a bat box will be put up.

COMING IN 2024

Next year, with the help of our volunteers, we aim to extend our habitat restoration, and also to include private gardens. A campaign to reduce the harmful pesticides and herbicides in Otley is planned and we would like to share with our members some alternatives which will not damage our insects.

Our Nature Restoration Plan for Otley will continue into 2024 with the support of our members and Otley Town Council, and we look forward to seeing the results of our hard work in the coming Spring.

There is still hands on work to do before the Spring gets here, so whether you are an old hand at this or just curious, why not come along to one of our volunteer events listed below.

West Chevin Road on Saturday 6 January, 10—12

We are returning to the mini meadow on the corner by the Otley Business Centre on West Chevin Road, to rake up the grass cuttings and disturb the ground. Please bring a spade, good gloves and lots of enthusiasm.

The Parish Churchyard on Friday 12 January, 10—12

Our return to the Churchyard, to prepare the wildflower strips for spring, bring a good pair of gloves.

Burras Lane on Friday 19 January, 10—12

We are partnering to lend our skills to the LCC team who are tree planting on Burras Lane. Please bring a spade, good gloves and lots of enthusiasm.

WHARFEDALE BARN OWLS JOINS WILDLIFE FRIENDLY OTLEY



Wharfedale Barn Owls is a small group of volunteers working to support and expand the small Barn Owl population in Wharfedale. Specifically the group raise funds and coordinate volunteers to build and erect Barn Owl nest boxes to support the existing population and encourage nesting in new areas.

They undertake monitoring of nest sites to support the conservation effort. We are proud to have them join our little charity as a subcommittee and support their continued good work to understand and improve the habitat for this magnificent raptor - specifically working with local farmers and landowners to increase and improve open fields and rough grassland.

Wildlife Friendly Otley's Education Officer, Neil Griffin has really welcomed the group as a major focus for them is education and we'll be hoping to work collaboratively in 2024 to bring Barn Owl conservation awareness into our local schools.

11 MONTHS ON AND YOU OWN WESTON WOODS

In February 2024 we joined a small group of local environmental and community groups, led by Menston Area Nature Trust, to see if we could acquire Weston Woods for wildlife and for people.

East Wood, fondly known as Weston Woods locally, was up for sale, potentially to developers, for its wood as a resource or as a place to breed game birds! Can you imagine!!



The wood is just a small area of mixed deciduous woodland but is home to red kites, goldcrests, tree creepers, warblers, woodpeckers and tawny owls. It has oak, birch, beech, elder and sycamore trees and throughout the seasons the woodland floor provides a wonderful display of bluebells, wild garlic, fruiting brambles and many more woodland flowers, mosses and lichens.

With over 1500 people supporting the project financially the group have now completed the purchase and are proud owners of Weston Woods. This was featured on Look North in December with Claire and Neil representing Wildlife Friendly Otley.

There is still plenty of work to do, and in 2024 the group will be working on a woodland management plan, ensuring this small pocket of wonder is there for wildlife and for you and your family for years to come.

STATE OF NATURE REPORT — WILDLIFE FRIENDLY OTLEY JOIN LARGE SCALE ACTION TO RESTORE NATURE NOW

The State of Nature Report, led by the RSPB and supported by more than 60 conservation and research organisations, is the latest report to chart the decline of British wildlife.

Its authors said the problems and solutions have never been better understood but what is missing is large scale action. The Chief Executive of the Wildlife and Countryside line said the report’s findings contain ‘heart-stoppingly horrible figures’.

Chris Packham, made a call to action saying ‘It doesn’t matter whether you’re into bats, bumblebees, butterflies, birds, bugs or badgers - ultimately, we need to come together’.

The newly formed Restore Nature Now movement states that the birdwatchers, rambles, ecologists, pond dippers, river-swimmers, anglers, scientists, butterfly counters, gardeners, rewilders, and conservationists are just ordinary people taking action in extraordinary times.

With this in mind Claire Blindell and Helen Hey set off to York to represent Wildlife Friendly Otley outside the DEFRA building in the centre of the city.

Amy-Jane Beer, who was one of our speakers at our Arts Festival, was at the York protest and expressed her deep concerns, saying, ‘I was born in 1970 - the year now used as a benchmark for the catastrophic declines in biodiversity. I feel that loss personally. The failure of governments to act will haunt all our futures. No one who now neglects immediate, decisive, and sustained action on climate and ecological restoration can call themselves a leader’.



Helen Hey, Amy Jane Beer, Claire Blindell

REVAMPED LEAFLET

Our popular ‘Where to see wildlife’ leaflet and map has had a facelift for its reprint. Bulk copies will be distributed far and wide (as well as locally) in January. Thanks to Otley’s Leeds City Councillors; Colin Campbell, Sandy Lay and Rye Downes for the grant for reprinting costs.

WILDLIFE ARTS FESTIVAL

2023



The third edition of our unique Wildlife Arts Festival was once again hailed as a great success.

It was based around an exhibition that was widely-agreed to be of very high quality and great variety, featuring the work of 5 creative groups and a further 20 individual artists. The three popular evening events – Boff Whalley and Dan Bye’s “These Hills Are Ours”, Amy Jane Beer’s “Wild Water, Wild Service”, and George McGavin’s “What Have Insects Ever Done For Us?” featured contrasting styles, but with an overlap of subject matter: enjoying the outdoors and nature in all its glorious facets. Six factual wildlife talks were all well-attended at the Labour Rooms, and a printing workshop at Art Works was extremely popular. A new addition was a poetry workshop at Otley Studio. The chainsaw sculpting demonstration was spectacular. Children loved the crafts workshop at the library and sticker art at the Courthouse.

The festival then switched its focus to Otley schools, with readings of wildlife books by Neil Griffin and Rosie Scurfield at Pool School; a talk by George McGavin at Prince Henry’s, and a visit by author Jeanne Willis to All Saints.

Read more [here](#) and [here](#).



Neil Griffin, Dan Bye, Boff Whalley and Helen Hey



The bustling hall of the exhibition



Helen Hey, Amy Jane Beer, Claire Blindell



FEED THE BIRDS

Rob has been working with some local care and nursing homes to see if we could use some of their green space to both support our birds and provide some interest and joy to the residents.

Neil and Cathy went along to Wharfeside Care Home and treated the residents to a short presentation on what wildlife could be seen there. They also took along a donation of bird feeders and bird seeds.



SCIENCE FAIR — FOCUS ON WILDLIFE

Along with other nature, climate change and wildlife focussed organisations and charities we delivered an exciting and popular display at Otley Science Fair on 18 November.

We were really pleased to see our friends from the Denton Moor Peat Bog Restoration there who joined us earlier this year to present their work and invite our members to join their citizen science project.

We ensured our display was family friendly with our ever popular Poo Quiz and our Footprint Quiz. We also had 2 microscopes and a range of bugs, plants, wings and slides that could be viewed.



Our stall, just before the rush

VOLUNTEERS

A MASSIVE THANK YOU TO OUR LOVELY VOLUNTEERS FOR ALL YOUR HARD WORK IN 2023

In 2023 our amazing volunteers have helped us plant dozens of native fruit trees and thousands of native wildflower bulbs to attract insects, birds and provide habitat for small mammals.

We're always keen to encourage you all to become involved and support activities - so if you've whether your an old hand at this or never volunteered before, why not come along to an event and meet us? We are a friendly bunch, it's in the name!

email : wildlifefriendlyotley@gmail.com

SCHOOL REPORT

POOL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Other than the festival, this autumn's schools work has largely concentrated on the restoration of Pool School's large wildlife pond. A group of children, parents and WFO trustees spent a considerable time clearing the pond of litter, including the predictable dropped dipping nets and the less likely laptops and traffic cones! There were a lot of frogs despite the less than ideal conditions. The children used WFO's gardening tools to plant saplings and create a hibernaculum. They also restored a bug hotel and went on a minibeast hunt. Our activities were keenly observed by a bold Robin, and a vole popped out a couple of times.



REWILDING SCHOOLS

One of our partners, Yorkshire Rewilding Network are hosting an exciting free webinar:

Rewilding Britain's Schools - empowering young people to reconnect with nature and shape the future. With Lesley Malpas, CEO of Operation Future Hope.

Tuesday 16th January 2024 at 19.30 - 20.30.

Yorkshire Rewilding Network

Lesley Malpas
CEO of Operation Future Hope

Rewilding Britain's Schools
Empowering young people to reconnect with nature and shape the future

Tuesday, 16th January, 2024. 19.30 - 20.30

Free webinar

The talk will explain why it is so important to engage children with nature within their school environment and give practical guidance and examples on how to rewild school grounds both in urban and rural locations. Lesley will also discuss the urgent need for cultural change, show how children are at the centre of this, and explain how rewilding is also a movement that can lead us towards a much needed tipping point in human history where we transition to Earth stewardship and regenerative cultures.

Please register in advance by going to the Events page on YRN website and following the link on that page: <https://www.yorkshirerewildingnetwork.org.uk/events/>

MEET YOUR TRUSTEES



Andrew McKeon

The idea that Otley could be the UK's first 'Wildlife Friendly Town' provided the incentive to see if we could create something that would inspire others to be wildlife friendly and do something for nature at a local community level that would make a difference.



River Six

In the beginning, my drive to create Wildlife Friendly Otley was informed by my frustration with the national conservation charities continued growth whilst wildlife was still declining. I strongly believe the local approach to conservation Wildlife Friendly Otley represents is the most effective way we can make a difference.



Catherine Burton

I've worked as an ecologist for many years and was keen to put my skills to good use in the local area. I saw the action that Wildlife Friendly Otley was taking to directly address the biodiversity crisis and wanted to be a part of it. I can often be found making wildlife habitats and leading minibeast walks.



Claire Blindell

I started helping out with publicity and community engagement back in 2019. More recently I've been supporting WFO's work on community orchards and habitat restoration. These sorts of projects are so important for nature recovery on a local and national scale - it's great to be part of a small team making a big difference to wildlife and to people.



Helen Hey

I became a member during lockdown. I needed a positive distraction from working hard in the NHS and was drawn to working with wildlife. I specifically chose a small, local charity as in my opinion, this is where some of the most meaningful work happens. I particularly like working with people and you'll most likely see me on stalls, at events or supporting some activities in schools.



Jane Smith

I'm passionate about reversing the rapid decline of our biodiversity. We have lost more than half of our wildlife, and urgently need to restore and create as much habitat as possible. We are trying to change the way our green spaces in Otley are managed by planting community orchards, restoring habitat, reducing the use of herbicides, pesticides and helping our community to support its flora and fauna.



Neil Griffin

I joined WFO through the contrasting emotions of love for wildlife and fear of the biodiversity crisis. As a teacher I'm particularly keen to engage the younger generation with nature, just as I got that rewarding connection with wildlife as a seven year old. It's great to work as part of a team with a variety of talents, all working towards the same important goal.



Rob Tindall

I am a huge wildlife fan and I worked with WFO to help make the garden where I work more wildlife friendly. By becoming a trustee it means I can be that bit more involved in really making a difference in the town of Otley.



Sarah Shipp

I've always taken a keen interest in wildlife and the countryside and it's really good to be able to learn more by being part of WFO. I enjoy taking part in the events that we run as it's interesting to hear what concerns local people have about our wildlife and I also like helping out with practical projects such as the recent orchard planting.