

Issue 3, September 2024

Holmedale Nature Network Newsletter

And here we are in

Autumn...welcome! Have you felt the coolness of the mornings and the evenings now? Have you seen your first frost? Maybe as the kids have gone back to school, you have also had that back to school feeling and taken time to reflect and let go of the summer. And hopefully not got into the winter is coming panic, something that can be hard to navigate. The Holmedale Nature Network took a pause on events over the summer apart from a brilliant family activity day in August, however our events calendar is back on as you will see on the following pages.



Still working on it...

The Holmedale Nature Network connects the parishes of Barningham, Newsham, Dalton, Gayles, Kirby Hill, Ravensworth, Whashton, Gilling West, Aske and Skeeby with the aim of nurturing nature and improving biodiversity across our dale. We are still building our organisation to meet the Charity Commission's requirements for a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This autumn we are also carrying out a consultation with Skeeby residents, the newest additions to the network. Feedback on results from Skeeby and Gilling West will follow. In the meantime, our volunteers have been out and about the area engaging with nature, tackling invasive species and surveying the quality of local habitats and watercourses. Read on!

Lizzie Rumble, Martha McBarron, and the Holmedale Nature Network Team



Great UK Waterblitz - September

Over the weekend of 20-23rd September, volunteers from across Holmedale and the UK headed out to their local beck to test for nitrates and phosphates. We tested at 20 sites, including 11 locations that we are using for on-going monitoring of river flies. Test kits were provided by FreshWaterWatch, a long-term global monitoring initiative.

Nitrates and phosphates occur naturally in the environment but run-off from farms and incomplete treatment of sewage can result in high concentrations which are harmful to ecosystem health and aquatic life. Overall, we found that our headwaters had low levels of nutrients (good for the ecological status) increasing to moderate to high nitrates and moderate phosphates as we moved down the catchment. The rivers' trusts can use the data to identify priorities for their work in reducing inputs. A full results map can be found at: <https://www.freshwaterwatch.org/pages/great-uk-waterblitz-results#RESULTS>

Holmedale Nature Network's family day - August



In August, we hosted a family nature session at Dalton. On offer was a nature walk, followed by snacks and a multitude of activities to do in the village hall. Catherine Mason, from the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, obtained a sample of live river flies for children to look at and identify, with a microscope for some close up viewing. There was also a fishing game, leaf rubbing and making dragonfly pegs.

In the afternoon session, the children were given owl pellets to dissect. These tightly compressed pellets had to be soaked for an hour before it was possible to prise open and reveal their secrets - an astonishing number of small bones and teeth from their prey.

Several families attended and feedback was positive: *"The event was absolutely fantastic and my children had the best time (and me)."*



Tackling Himalayan Balsam - June and July

Nearly 40 volunteers helped out with our balsam pulling sessions in Dalton, Newsham, Ravensworth, Whashton and Gilling West, contributing over 160 hours of effort to remove an estimated 40,000 plants! Many volunteers found it quite enjoyable. The balsam is easy to pull and breaking the stem between the roots and the first node often results in a gratifying snapping sound.

We were well supported by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, which provided initial training for the group; North Yorkshire Council, which mowed a ½ mile stretch of verge that had become heavily infested with balsam; and the MOD, which allowed access for survey work and pulling.



The strategy for our first year was to focus on a 5m corridor around the becks in the upper part of the catchment, i.e., in Newsham and Dalton. This reduces transmission of balsam seeds downstream and follows the 'top of the catchment down' approach as recommended by the rivers' trusts. We also ran pulling sessions at road bridges over the becks in Whashton and Gilling West, to reduce potential seed spreading by vehicles and walkers.

We are now working on our pulling strategy for 2025. There are a number of large areas that will require considerable manpower to tackle. The plan for these is to engage with corporate groups looking for volunteer days.



Surveying and much, much more

As you may already know, surveying is about collecting information. This may sound a bit dull ...but for me it is so much more than that. I am hoping that in sharing my experiences I will inspire others to pick up a clipboard and maybe a waterproof. 😊

So where to start... bees I guess, as that is where I started. **Bumblebee surveying** or bee walks involve following a set route on foot and observing the bumblebees in close proximity to you. Wonderfully, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust set the conditions to survey in as relatively warm, preferably sunny, with low wind. That means fair weather walking hurray!! And because of that, you get outside when the sun is shining if you can. I don't think I need to say how much that can lift your mood, plus the health benefits of stretching the legs.

So how do you spot them? The easiest way is to listen for their buzz. Sometimes it can be fun as distant chainsaws and aeroplanes can sound deceptively like bumblebees and of course other flying insects buzz too. This means bringing close attention to the sounds around you, taking your attention away from a never ending to do list. Did you know bumblebees play? Have a look for some great YouTube videos of bumblebees having a whale of a time playing with balls.



My favourite bumblebee, the Bilberry bumblebee or mountaineer



Right **earthworms...** there are some pros and cons of earthworm sampling. To collect the earthworms, you dig a pit and sift through the soil with your hands to find the worms. There is something deeply grounding about feeling the earth in your hands. I am sure any keen gardener is familiar with the satisfying feel of good compost. Unfortunately, you must kill them to identify them (done as humanely as possible) but I still find myself apologising to the worm as I drop it into a bath of alcohol. There is a project running to see if AI can do a better job of identifying live earthworms (updates from the Earthworm Society - yes, it exists!). Also, this year, sampling was not quite as enjoyable as it chucked it down with rain and there were no hot drinks or cake to cheer us up and keep us going. And you would think there would be more worms in the rain. Sadly, not this time.

Next up **meadow surveying**. I mean you get to sit in a meadow surrounded by flowers, insects and birds. Taking time to really notice the detail of grasses and flowers to identify them creates in me this sense of wonder of our natural world.

You may have noticed a theme; I have mentioned sound, feel and sight. This coming season I can add smell and not quite taste but the feel on your tongue is certainly used by waxcap fungi experts. Surveying is important to help us understand and assess the health of nature, as well as the impacts of change, both positive and negative. And the exciting thing is that research shows that if we have a better connection with nature through our senses, we are more likely to take care of it.

Thank you for reading, *Lizzie*



Fancy a go at a nature survey? Keen to get involved?

These survey projects (and others) are run and funded by the Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust and Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected. Several volunteers from Holmedale are now trained in bee surveys. Email: wildwhashton@gmail.com to express interest in the 2025 season.



Upcoming talks and activities

Fabulous Fungi, Science, Fiction, Facts, Forays and Fun, a light-hearted but fact-filled talk by Catherine Gillie, a member of the North East Fungus Study Group for over 25 years. At the end, you'll have an opportunity to try to identify fungi from smells! **Monday 21st October**, 7:30 to 9:00pm, Newsham Village Hall. £2 donation. *To be followed by a foray walk (overleaf).*

Woodland Fungi Foray, led by Catherine Gillie at Gill Beck, Barningham, an educational session to learn about fungi species and their identification based on where they are found. **Wednesday, 23rd October**, 10am-12noon. £3 donation. **Book at:** wildwhashton@gmail.com.



Visit to Pepperfield Farm Hedgehog Rescue, Dalton on Tees. **Saturday 26th October**, 11am start. £5 donation per family or £2 per person. **Book at:** wildwhashton@gmail.com

Helping hedgehogs, a talk by Nicki Lancaster, sharing her experiences and footage of the hedgehogs she has looked after in her garden. **Monday 18th November**, 7:30 to 8:30pm, Newsham Village Hall. (postponed from September)

Opportunities

WANTED

Volunteers to build our network:

- Local survey group
- Talks and events planning
- Communications team

Get involved with our friendly volunteer group!

Contact us on wildwhashton@gmail.com or call Martha on 07984 756080 to discuss your interests.

Winter Tree & Hedge Tasks

Join our friendly volunteer sessions to plant and maintain trees and hedges this winter.

Please contact Martha:

marthamcbarron@outlook.com

07984 756080

Woodland volunteers wanted

For various tasks that will help the young trees to survive and flourish in Whashton.

Contact Paul: paulbernard99@googlemail.com

SWIFT ASSIST - these fabulous birds will start arriving back from south Africa in early May.

A truly awesome migration which sees them here for only a few short months. If Swift numbers are not to decline further and faster, these birds need our support to find more nest sites. They like to nest high, seem to prefer North and East aspects and there is no mess so they make good tenants.

Please contact me if Swifts have nested at your house in Summer 2024 (recording numbers is important) and/or if you would like additional accommodation for 2025? Likewise if you think you could provide a new site on your property please get in touch. Assistance may be available to source and put up nest boxes depending on location and demand.

Please contact Charlotte on 07936 136076

New Woodland

Do you have a potential site for woodland creation?

The **White Rose Forest** has government funding for tree planting in North Yorkshire. The scheme is fully funded including design, regulatory approvals, fencing, and 15 years' maintenance. Areas of any size considered.

The Holmedale Nature Network is already working with a local landowner to deliver a free woodland scheme on their property. If you want a local agent, you can contact us on wildwhashton@gmail.com

Alternatively, contact White Rose Forest direct on 01484 416506 or whiteroseforest@kirklees.gov.uk.

www.whiteroseforest.org

Holmedale Nature Network contacts: Anne and Edmund Baker, Ken Bell, Alison Brown, Janet Clipsham, Linda Goulbourne, Kathryn Hall, Stefan Ivanovic, Ian Mains, Ian Marshall, Martha McBarron, John Moore, Ian Moreton, Nicky Oakes, Ken Rostron, Lizzie Rumble, Matthew Usher, Suzy Wilson.

Don't see a name you recognise? Email us at wildwhashton@gmail.com and we will advise on your local contact