



On the Foss

Autumn
2018

News from The River Foss Society

As our events season comes to an end, what have we achieved this year?

In May some members attended the first part of a riparian mammal recognition course led by Ann Hanson of Yorkshire Mammal Group and Yorkshire Farming & Wildlife Partnership in conjunction with St. Nick's nature reserve, who had obtained funds for it from Local Nature Partnership. The aim is to conduct a survey of the Foss to find out what wildlife is present. To this end water vole rafts have been left in the river near Strensall.

We used the skills learned on this course in July when a member of the public asked for help in objecting to a planning proposal. Two RFS members and an expert from St. Nick's donned waders (we now possess several pairs) to search the banks of the Foss at Huntington for evidence of water voles.

Possible evidence was found and submitted to the Planning Authority. Several more vole hunts have been carried out since, finding signs of voles and otters.

Early summer saw 11 balsam pulls (plus one trial of hoeing and scything) at sites including Huntington Road, York, Haxby Lock, Strensall and Yearsley Lock.

Another pull was done by Goodgym, who run out from York, do a conservation activity then run back again! A lot of balsam was removed; a lot remains. Although attractive to bees, this pernicious weed now infests almost all parts of the river and has spread inland, out-competing and endangering native wildflowers and causing erosion of the riverbanks in the winter when it dies. However, the balsam was weaker at sites where we had worked last year. The hope (and evidence) is that by persisting for a number of years, we can make a real difference along the Foss. While pull-

ing we spoke to members of the public to make them aware of the problem. A few even joined us!

Water testing continues throughout the year. The results go to the Dales and Vales Rivers Trust; we await their evaluation. It's already clear that the (perfectly legal) sewage discharge

leys and furniture. Litter pickers get a good feeling about what they're doing for the city, especially with favourable comments from the public, including visitors. Our RFS tabards get good publicity for our Society. Barry Thomas also responded to enquiries from two York companies, helping them to set up their own litter picking operations.

The whole length of the Foss Walk has been walked and problems with access and signage identified. Definite obstructions such as a "Keep Out" sign are reported to NYCC; they have the longest network of footpaths in the UK and no resources so can do little about more minor problems. All problems are reported to the Ramblers Association. We hope to begin a project to put route markers along the Foss Walk and

have also been trying to press for an alternative route for the Walk other than along the busy Towthorpe Road.

The Society supports the Castle Gateway Project, including a continuous footpath along the Foss and a new cycle/pedestrian bridge. In addition we have replied to a survey about slowing the flow in the Ouse and Foss. Our new Planning member, Andy Mulholland, has his eye on planning applications in Piccadilly.

Part funding has been granted by City of York Council for an interpretation board at Heworth Green like that at Strensall which we installed in 2016. The balance will be paid by the RFS. We hope this will make more of the public aware of the flora and fauna of the river, and of our Society.

So yes, we have recently done quite a lot for the river. But we can do even more with more new members – please encourage others to join!

Alison Scott

What do we do for the River?



Top left: water sampling at Strensall; top right: ready for vole searching; below: litter picking on the Foss

from Walbutts Sewage Plant at Strensall is affecting the river, particularly nitrate levels.

With City of York Council, we carried out four litter picks, including participation in the 'Clean for York' long weekend in March. A significant amount of general litter – paper, food cartons, plastic cups, tins, bottles etc. – was collected, along with pulling out larger items such as shopping trol-



End of the season

Wednesday 17 October Autumn Open Meeting and talk about the Hungate dig. Meet 7.00 pm at Strensall Village Hall. Contact: John Millett.

Saturday 20 October Litter pick along the Foss. Meet at 9.15 at the Blue Bridge on Foss islands Road opposite Morrison's. Please let Barry Thomas know if you are taking part. Contact: Barry Thomas

Sunday 2 December Christmas Lunch at Novotel, York. Meet at 11.00. Lunch will be preceded by a talk on the history of the Merchant Adventurers' Hall and its early link with the River Foss by the Clerk to the Company, Captain Stephen Upright D.L., R.N. Booking essential. Contact: Mike Gray

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An Osprey was seen recently flying along the Foss – possibly the same bird seen taking advantage of the fish in RFS member David Findlay's pond at his home along Haxby Road. The Osprey, probably a bird on passage, was seen to pluck at least one healthy fish from the pond.



Also taking advantage of the well-stocked pond were several Goosanders and Cormorants.

A fleeting glimpse

Two very unwelcome guests were spotted: a pair of Mink who were not the least bit concerned by folk walking by.

John Millett

The photograph (not on the Foss) was taken by John Spring

Low water



During the summer and September we saw exceptionally low water levels in many part of the Foss. Our photograph shows the water level well below the new



Chub were still seen in parts of the river with better water levels

gauge recently installed by the Environment Agency at Lower Lilling Lane.

However, in certain other parts of the Foss the water level remained reasonable showing a healthy population of Chub (above).

John Millett

An emergency prevented

It was reported on Tuesday 2 October that the rising main carrying raw sewage from Cobbs Cottage Pumping Station, Strensall, to Walbutts Waste Water Treatment plant had burst. In places, this main runs within twelve metres of the Foss.

Fortunately the leakage was spotted by a local resident who passed the information on to Strensall Parish Council. They contacted Yorkshire Water plc, who promptly shut off the pipeline and diverted the sewage to the holding tanks at Cobbs Cottage. They are utilising road tankers to transfer the sewage elsewhere. So far no contamination of the Foss has occurred, thanks to the prompt action of a Foss walker and Strensall PC.



Heading home after a good litter pick

Nine members met to do a litter pick on 21 July at the footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Two were dispatched to work on the boat/pontoon whilst the remainder were split up into two groups. One group concentrated on the area at the rear of Rowntrees Wharf, and then proceeded to the Castle Mills Lock area whilst

the second group covered the river banks downstream from the Castle Car Park, once again the most polluted area for litter.

We then all met up at Castle Mills lock. All members were wearing RFS tabards, which

Pick it up!

clearly gave us some good publicity; there were several reports of communications with the public, mainly visitors, which were both jovial and positive.

In all we collected 10 full green bin liners and filled the two builders' bags strapped to the pontoon. There were also three large items recovered from the river bed. Grateful thanks go to those members who turned up on the day.

Don't forget that the last litter pick of the year will be on Saturday 20 October at 9.30 at the usual location.

Barry Thomas

Another evening stroll



On 29 August a record number of walkers – twenty two in all – arrived at the Stone Trough pub, Kirkham for the four mile evening walk. We walked up the hill and through the fields (fortunately the lively bullocks were a good distance away), past Firby Hall, a grade II listed building, and on to Westow.

At Westow we stopped to admire the view which reminded one walker of Tuscany, with a bit of imagination! We next headed up the hill, across a couple more fields, through a wood and back along the road to the pub where we enjoyed a good meal.

Anne Bednarski

A wonderful view at Westow

Did you know that the River Foss Society is on Facebook too?

On 11 August 2018 the RFS made history! Our trip on the Pocklington Canal Amenity Society's "New Horizons" was the first organised one on the newly re-opened Melbourne to Bielby section of the canal. This section of the canal had been shut for decades.

A moment of history



Walbut Lock and swing bridge

We totalled the maximum of 12 passengers and three crew – Roger, Steve and RFS member Adrian Lovett. So, with the sun shining we made our way out of the Melbourne Arm to start our new adventure.

We travelled sedately eastwards along, under Church Bridge to the re-gated Thornton Lock, the first of two. The locks are over 6 ft deep and take quite a time to fill but this is fascinating to see. Then it was on to Walbut Bridge and Lock, also restored. The water was very clear and shoals of fish could be easily seen. There were also myriads of damselflies and very large dragonflies (brown darter, I believe).

Two swans swam ahead as if to show us the way. Once through the swing bridge – a marvel of balance – we were near our turning round point, the Arm at Bielby. There are no stopping points at present, so with half the trip completed and a journey time of two hours to this point, we about turned and headed contentedly back towards the Melbourne Arm. Perfect!

Elaine Mepham

Because of the interest a second trip was made on 20 September. Rain started as "New Horizons" was boarded and became increasingly heavy.

The two swans were seen again, this time with their almost fully grown five cygnets. Two grebes swam ahead for a time to again to show the way!



Making history!



Church Bridge, Melbourne. Architecturally one of the best bridges on the canal system.

The crew of John, helped again by Steve and member Adrian, was assisted by two other willing RFS members, Neil and Michael. All got thoroughly wet but were much admired and thanked by those who stayed dry inside the boat! Their efforts shortened the complete journey to three and a half hours (or was it because of the weather?).

Peter Hopwood

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk



Coxwold and Husthwaite walk

Eleven members and guests met at Coxwold car park on 8 August, a brilliant warm day. Although we had experienced showers earlier, it remained dry for our walk. Our route to Husthwaite took us via the historic Angram Hall village, passing the disused Husthwaite railway station and climbing the hill into Husthwaite village.

Our return route was via Beacon Bank which gave a magnificent view over the valley to Kilburn and beyond. We completed our walk at the Fauconberg



Arms pub where we were given a warm welcome and enjoyed a very tasty lunch.

John Millett

Our president Alastair Fitter was kind enough to invite us to watch a demonstration of moth trapping in his garden backing onto the River Foss in Huntington.

Getting to know moths

the types of moth trap available. All use a light with a wavelength towards the ultra-violet to attract

Around a dozen members arrived around dusk on 16 August and were first shown a selection of



Opening the moth trap in the morning



A stunning Poplar Hawk Moth

the moths, requiring a well sheltered back garden or tolerant neighbours with thick curtains.

This has not been a notable year for moths and as rather expected the haul during the evening was not

large. Alastair and his friend Terry Crawford proved to be knowledgeable hosts indeed, identifying all the couple of dozen or so species that arrived. Not only did we see a variety of locally common moths, but we learned about their behaviour and food plants too.

The following morning a hardy few returned to see what had arrived later in the night. Again, the numbers were disappointing, and all were fairly common local moths, perhaps the most notable being a solitary Poplar Hawk Moth.

Our thanks to Alastair for a fascinating and informative evening (and morning) and a chance to see something not often on view.

Mike Gray

Walking with bats

Community Action for Nature (CAN), a local conservation group based alongside the Foss at New Earswick, recently bought some bat detectors to help highlight the population of bats they are helping along and around the river.

Back in May, around fifteen of us gathered by the side of Lock Keeper's Cottage at 8pm, little knowing what fun we were about to have! We wandered slowly upstream with RFS member Will Durrant, one of the founders of CAN, telling us about it, its work and the reserve given to them a few years ago. He showed us the bat boxes they have made and put up on various trees and explained how bats chose which one to use according to the warmth they provide.

We walked about half a mile and then waited by the river near some trees for the bats to appear. This they did around 9.15 pm. We were armed with

several bat detectors, little hand-held devices which use a heterodyne technique to translate the bats' ultrasonic calls to one audible to humans. Each type of bat emits a different frequency so you need to have some idea of what you are looking for so that you can tune your de-



Using a bat detector

tor accordingly, and CAN's members certainly knew 'their' bats.

A couple of them even had an attachment on their mobile phones that could identify the species from the sounds made.

It was surreal! We first heard and then saw just one bat, then more and more came out, and with the five detectors spread out along about 30 metres of the bank, we heard them as they flew up and down the river catching insects; this in turn allowed us to see them too. The sounds were a sort of rattle with two distinct patterns audible even to the novice. The mobile phone devices told us that there were Common and Soprano Pipistrelles as well as a couple of Noctule Bats aloft.



Will Durrant tells the group about bat boxes

All in all an unforgettable experience, and one that was repeated in July and September allowing a couple of dozen RFS members to have a rather special evening. Thank you, Will and Christine Durrant and your CAN colleagues, for all your explanations and guidance.

Mike Gray

In our Winter issue – we look at the Environment Agency proposals for flood control



After a day of frequent, blustery showers, the evening of 7 September proved to be warm and dry. Twenty one members and guests met at the Ship Inn pub to pre-order supper before setting off. The route took us

path via Walbutts' water treatment plant and Cowslip Hill. We returned to the village via the Foss footpath, arriving back at the Ship Inn at dusk, where fifteen walkers enjoyed a welcome supper.

John Millett

Enjoying the Common

a short distance along the Foss before taking a footpath into the village, turning on to Lords Moor Lane and crossing the Flaxton Road. This led to the common where we took the perimeter path around the golf course.

Leaving the common we followed the

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