



## On the pull!

Last year, the latest of our annual campaigns to reduce the presence of Himalayan Balsam along the Foss, saw 40 members out and about pulling up this invasive weed. Without doubt we had an impact, but we'll have to wait until late May or early June to see just how much. It's unlikely we'll eliminate it from the Foss altogether, if only because access further upstream is difficult, but you never know. We can at least keep it in check and give our native plants a better chance.

Over the next few weeks we'll be planning some more sessions for 2019 – the exact timing will depend upon what the weather has in store for us, but put a note in your diary and look out for emails in mid-May giving details and asking for volunteers. We've already had a few enthusiastic souls saying they'd like to have another go – it's really a rather satisfying pastime: the roots are shallow and the plants come up easily with a sort of squishing sound.

Please let me know sooner rather than later if you are interested, especially if you don't use email, and



*Waders  
not always  
necessary*



I can make sure you are the first to hear about this year's efforts. We'll be working from the York end of Huntington Road up to Walbutt's Sewage works above Strensall, so there'll be a session near you.

Our intention is to run a series of pulls both in the evening and during the day, at weekends as well as during the week. There's no need to stay for the full session, come along for as long or short a time as you like. It's not only environmentally useful, it's also fun and a chance to meet like-minded members.

*Mike Gray gbwmike@gmail.com or 07596 366342*

*Bob Jowett takes  
us through this  
season's first  
two walks ...*

## A New walking year

Our first walk of the season – a circular route – had 14 walkers and one dog who met at the Blacksmith's Arms Farlington on March



*Ready to go from Farlington*

4th. In excellent weather we headed on the Foss Walk path past Black Collar Hall Farm towards Upper Towthorpe. We turned left up to the Stillington/Sheriff Hutton road where we continued east. We headed north passing close to Whenby Lodge Bull Breeding Centre. After joining the Whenby road, we walked west along the road, then up to Whenby Church.

We enjoyed our refreshments looking at the beautiful view. Leaving the church we headed west through Whenby. The path then goes roughly south til it returns to Farlington.

Most of us enjoyed liquid refreshments at the Blacksmith's Arms.

April 2nd saw another circular Foss Walk, this time from Easingwold. Our group of four – plus a dog – left the market place and went along Millfield Lane. We were pleasantly surprised to see the gated footpath now clear to walk, for this had been completely overgrown with brambles the last time we tried to use it.



*A lovely picnic at Oulston*

We headed across a field then along Thornton Lane past Thornton Lodge Farm which has holiday lodges and a fishing lake. It is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty. We were pleased to see that the stile, having been cleared, could now be seen. We walked north into Oulston and enjoyed a picnic sat around a tree.

After struggling to get the dog over some stiles we arrived back in Easingwold where we enjoyed a snack at a coffee shop



## Spring & Summer Fun

### APRIL

**Saturday 27 April** Litter Pick on Foss. Meet at footbridge opposite Morrisons. Information on car parking from contact – Barry Thomas

### MAY

**Thursday 2 May** Moor Monkton walk 5.5 miles. Meet on Moor Monkton Main Street/Church Lane near telephone box. Meal at the Red Lion, Poppleton. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**May – June** Himalayan Balsam pulling. At various places from Yearsley Baths upwards. Last year 40+ members joined in the pulls over several weeks. We're hoping to attract even more to help this year! Let Mike know by email or phone if you can help. Contact: Mike Gray

**Wednesday 8 May** Meet at 10.00 to choose lunch at the Flask Inn on A171 near Fylingdales YO22 4QH. A short talk over coffee, then more talking than walking as we stroll over the moors on good paths hearing about the Hawk & Owl Trust from the local wildlife Education Officer Tanya. We will make a donation to the Trust. A minimum 8 members is needed so be sure to contact Bob by the end of April. Contact: Bob Jowett

**Mid May** ?21.00 Lockkeeper's Cottage, Haxby Road. Bat walk with CAN, as last year but along another route. Details to follow, but we've been warned it might be darker and muddier! Contact: Mike Gray

**Tuesday 14 May** 11.15 Boyhood Memories (1950's) talk of boating on the River Foss and the last Castle Mills Gatekeeper. Followed by lunch at the Masons' Arms. Details from Peter when you express interest. Contact: Peter Hopwood

**Late May** Kirk Hammerton. Visit to "Make It Wild's" Sylvan Nature Reserve near Kirk Hammerton. It's very near the Ouse and very much something we'd like to see more of near the Foss. Numbers are limited, so book early! Donation of £7 per person. [www.makeitwild.co.uk](http://www.makeitwild.co.uk). Contact: Mike Gray

**Thursday 30 May** Boat trip on "Teesside Princess" on the River Tees between Yarm and the Barrage, with lunch on board. Details from Peter when you express interest. Contact: Peter Hopwood

### JUNE

**Thurs 6 June** 18.00 Walmgate. Toby Kendall of the York Archaeological Trust will lead a city centre walk. Contact: John Millett

**Wed 12 June** 18.00 Durham Ox pub car park. Crayke circular walk 3 miles. Meal afterwards in the pub. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**Thurs June 20** 10.00 Malham Tarn. Car share with meeting point to be decided. Visit to the National Trust at Malham Tarn with ranger Róisín Black to hear about their reintroduction of water voles. We will make a donation to the NT. Take a picnic to eat on site. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/profiles/six-questions-with-ranger-roisin-black> Contact: Mike Gray

**Wed 26 June** Boat trip on the Driffeld Navigation, with a picnic lunch provided. Details from Peter when you express interest. Contact: Peter Hopwood

**Fri 28 June** 09.30 TBA "Foss Walk" over two consecutive days 28.5 miles total. Contact: Bob Jowett

**Sat 29 June** 09.30 TBA "Foss Walk" over two consecutive days 28.5 miles total. Contact: Bob Jowett

### JULY

**Wed 3 July** 10.00 All Saints' Church Huntington carpark. Along the Foss from Huntington to Haxby 2.5 miles linear walk. Coffee/light lunch at Aroma Cafe. No 1 bus back to New Earswick then a short walk past the school and through the churchyard back to the car park. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**NOTE - Date change! Now Mon 8 July** 18.00 Ship Inn car park, Strensall. A walk around Strensall with John North of the Strensall History Society to hear about some of the less well-known bits of Strensall's history. Meal at the Ship Inn afterwards. Booking essential. Contact: Mike Gray

**Wed 17 July** 18.00 Sheriff Hutton circular 4.5 miles. Meet outside the Highwayman pub. Meal in the pub afterwards. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**Sat 20th July** 09.15 Footbridge opposite Morrisons. Litter pick along the Foss. Contact Barry about car parking. Contact: Barry Thomas

**Thurs 25 July** 17.30 Huntington All Saints Church car park. Evening walk along the Foss from Huntington to York, 3 - 4 miles depending on where we end up. Return by No 1 or No 5 bus. Meal afterwards venue TBA. Contact: Mike Gray

### CONTACTS

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Don't forget our website:

[www.riverfossociety.co.uk](http://www.riverfossociety.co.uk)



# River Foss Society

## Photographic Competition 2019

*Wildlife, Riverscapes, Fun or Family*  
*How do you want to portray the river?*

### Photographs to be taken:

- ✓ In the 12 months prior to August 2019
- ✓ Along the Foss Walk, or within 100m of the river or its tributaries
- ✓ By current members or their families

**CLOSING DATE 1st AUGUST 2019**

Winners announced and displayed at the Huntington Gala on 18th August

### Prizes

1st £25 book token and 'pride of place' in a new gallery page on RFS website

2nd £15 book token

Both will feature on the front page of the Autumn edition of *On the Foss*

### TO ENTER:

Send as an attachment to:  
[info@riverfossociety.co.uk](mailto:info@riverfossociety.co.uk)

Or post A4 prints to:  
RFS Events Organiser  
22 Drakes Close  
York YO32 9GN



### Conditions:

Permission is given for the photos to be used, with acknowledgement to the photographer, by the RFS on its website and publications

### Red Kites on the Foss



On a very cold day in March I went down to Towthorpe Bridge to look for a Barn Owl that had been reportedly seen there. I didn't find the Barn Owl but did see two Red Kites soaring over the river and the local meadow, later settling in a nearby tree.

Red Kites are becoming fairly common and are probably moving from the Pocklington area, having found their own way there from the re-introduction programme at Harewood House during the period 1999 – 2003, when 69 birds were released. The exact number of kites in Yorkshire is not known but in excess of 360 birds have been recorded at various roosting sites, so there could be many more, as not all come to the roost sites.

The photograph of the kites was taken by Les Waby on the common. The roosting information was provided by Nigel Puckrin, of the Yorkshire Red Kite programme who are always grateful to receive sightings via the "Contact Us" form on their web site: [www.yorkshireredkites.net](http://www.yorkshireredkites.net).

*John Millett*

### A new guardian for the Foss?



A member saw this on the Foss near Yearsley Bridge. What do you think it looks like? Let us know.

### On the Foss

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



*Mike Gray asks 'how healthy is the Foss?'*

## Is the Foss biodiverse?

Biodiversity is a measure of the variety of life forms present in an environment, in this case along and in the river Foss. In general, the more diverse your environment, the better it can withstand any changes, and the more interesting a place it is to be.

However you measure biodiversity though, the Foss doesn't score that highly. Near its source, not far from Oulston Reservoir, it's at its best, meandering its way between fields often lined with trees. Before long though, it starts to show the effects of human intervention, having frequently being straightened or guided round field margins, and by the time it gets south of Crayke, much of it is little more than a drainage ditch for the surrounding farms.

Worse still, the occasional green patches that do exist are not connected, either to each other along the Foss, or to the field margins and hedges that still survive. Connectivity is vital. Most wildlife, whether micro or macro, needs to be able to move around when its habitat is changed, whether naturally or by human activity. Populations need to be renewed and to gain new genetic material, and this cannot happen if they are isolated.

Once the river gets to Strensall, it becomes still less diverse with over-mown banks, no trees and few curves. Strensall to Towthorpe is barren – one of the most boring and neglected bits of river I have seen in the county. The lowest reaches are, of course, within the city and subject to much urban development, though there are plans afoot to make some minor improvements. Its concrete retaining walls are truly bare, though where bricks are used or where there are joints, nature does show its ability to colonise even the most unpromising areas.

River ecosystems that are heav-

ily modified can be restored, even if only on a small scale, and will rapidly contribute to biodiversity. Such restoration works include re-meandering (i.e. bringing back its curves), creating green banks and joining up existing green areas. Perhaps equally importantly, such improvements can slow the flow of water, and help reduce the removal of valuable and ir-

due to the intimate mix of organisms that require either wet or dry environments or can tolerate both. They provide food, shelter and breeding areas for all sorts of wildlife, and are valuable animal and plant circulation zones (ecological corridors). Trees and shrubs and their roots play a role in shading and thermal regulation of water, which is directly related to its oxygen content. At the same time they help decontaminate water coming downstream, and contribute to the protection of the banks against erosion, for example, reducing water speed via friction.



*A healthy Foss meanders along south of Oulston*



*Cropped bare with little diversity*

replaceable soil.

Aquatic biodiversity thrives in irregularly shaped river beds and banks, where fish, amphibians and insects can hide from predators. The current canalised river has a uniform cross-section which discourages biodiversity and it would benefit significantly from variations in velocity to allow riffles (shallow bits) and pools. The IDB champions speedy removal of water via straightened channels, rather than seeing the river as a complementary environment to its surroundings.

A riparian environment's diversity is

We do have good fish stocks in the Foss; they were clearly visible during the low flows we saw last summer, when water lilies and burr reeds quickly established themselves – a bonus of a lack of recent dredging. They are complemented by otters and kingfishers which prey upon them. We have also seen signs of water voles in several places between Huntington and Strensall: can we maybe do

something to improve the environment for them?

Climate change is impacting both aquatic and riparian biodiversity by reducing flows, lengthening periods of drought and producing more severe flood events, as well as warming rivers. River restoration can help biodiversity in several ways. Upstream wetland restoration and managed realignment will help increase water storage, planting of riparian trees will provide shade and reduce water temperature, and improved connectivity will allow organisms to interact naturally whether as predators or provisions.

How much we can achieve in this direction is unclear. The Internal Drainage Board is paid to remove rainwater from farmers' fields and is less than sympathetic to the cause. Many farmers though, seem to be getting involved in various land and soil management schemes. Certainly that is one way forward. Softly, softly.....