



There's a completely unnecessary tragedy waiting to happen for our wildlife and natural environment and coming from an unexpected source: the government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill. The bill removes most protections from individual wildlife sites, opting instead for a more general nature recovery fund. This is a strange perversion of what conservationists have been requesting for some time: nature recovery requires that we stop focussing on small patches of protected land and think on a larger scale, but that absolutely does not mean that we should remove protections from the few wildlife-rich places that remain: these patches of land are the arks from which recolonisation of the wider countryside will occur, if the government's plan is to be successful.

The bill allows developers to justify damage to an existing site by paying into a fund that will allow nature recovery somewhere else, in other words giving up a present good for a possible future good. Every nature conservation organisation has written to the government protesting about this proposal and even the government's own watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, has firmly ruled that it undermines protections for nature.

Ministers' response has been to

double down, with outrageous rhetoric blaming bats and newts for holding up development. In response, the Wildlife Trusts have shown that in 2024 bats and newts featured in just 3.3% of planning appeals. The Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB, among others, have offered constructive proposals for how to expedite development without damaging nature but ministers have blocked both these and amendments put forward by backbench MPs.

A threat looms!



Our members taking part in surveys which examine the biodiversity of the Foss – this could be affected by the new laws



A group of Labour MPs known as Labour Growth Group appears to be pushing hard for the legislation to pass unamended. Please consider writing to your MP to make the case for holding back on the bill. I have written to the York Outer MP, Luke Charters, and await a reply. I pointed out that the housing development that threatened Askham Bog in 2019, and that was rejected at a public inquiry, would almost certainly have gone ahead if this legislation had been in force then. He recently visited the Bog and is aware of its significance (see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ynu.org/posts/6848334415291576/>). I hope very much that he will add his voice to the concerns about the bill.

The Foss itself may not be at great risk from this bill, but our biodiversity definitely is.

Alistair Fitter



A Sincere Thank You

Our 2025 AGM in April featured the presentation of a unique gift to our Litter Pick organiser, Barry Thomas, who has recently stepped down. Barry has led the litter pick teams for 10 years, working on footpaths and the York Council's boat, Foxy. He has also organised the helpers who do monthly sampling of nitrates and phosphates in the Foss.

Barry will be leaving York in the near future, but every time he looks at the miniature trolley, adapted by his successor, Tim, he will have a perfect reminder of his time with River Foss Society.

Tim Rane (right) presents a thank you to Barry Thomas (left) for his years of help



Summer Scenario

JUNE/JULY

Balsam control. Pulling/trimming sessions Strensall to Monkbridge. More details soon from Paul Wilson paul.338wilson@btinternet.com

JULY

Fri 4th July 6.00 - 8.00 pm Meet by the Hound Lounge café in New Earswick. The plants and insects of the river Foss. A stroll guided by Alastair Fitter to discover what wildlife the riverbanks are supporting. The walk could well end in the Hogshhead in Hutington for those who wish! Contact Mike Gray.

Wed 9th July 6.00 pm Meet by the Gates of Beningbrough Hall. A short evening walk around the edge of the hall grounds along the Ouse, ending at the Blacksmith's Arms. Please let Anne Bednarski know if you are coming.

Thurs 10th July 7.00 pm The Riverside Centre, 187-189 Huntington Road. A chance for new members to meet some existing members, to see what the RFS does, and to have a chat over a glass and a nibble. Christine Gray/Helen Button.

Mon 14th July 10.00 am -12.00 noon The Water Walk Led by Simon Rogerson. This walk shows how water in myriad forms - ice, lakes, rivers, oceans - has shaped the city over thousands of years. We'll find out how to bridge a river with a river, meet the teetotaller who learnt that beer could be better than water, and play the ever-popular waterside quiz, Ouse Who? Meet in Museum Gardens, on the steps of The Yorkshire Museum, finishing by Merchant Adventurers Hall. Cost £7 per person HSBC business account no. 51349538, sort code 40-47-31 ref walk 02 or contact Mike Gray for other ways to pay in advance.

Tues 15th July 7.00 pm Wigginton Recreation Hall. All members are encouraged to come and find out what we do. The State of the Foss - how healthy is it and how does the Foss compare with other rivers? A presentation of the work RFS members are doing monitoring the river and of the projects we are involved in with York University plus various environmental groups.

Fri + Sat 18th /19th July The full Foss Walk. Day one: 16 miles; day 2: 12 miles. Please let Derek Chivers know if you will be walking.

Sat 2nd Aug 10.30 am The Blue Bridge in York. Two rivers circular walk: Foss and Ouse. About 4½ miles with optional riverside drink in York afterwards. Please let Derek Chivers know if you will be walking.

Sun 10th Aug 2.00 pm Pickering Slowing the Flow and beaver dams. Details nearer the time. Led by Mike Potter. Booking essential via Mike Gray. We will be car sharing at some point as there is limited parking. We'll travel up to the remote upper catchment of the river Seven, on Sutherland Beck, looking first at some man-made woody debris dams from the Slowing the Flow scheme, then up to the beaver enclosure. All relatively easy walking. Mike will talk about the how and why of Natural Flood Management and how beavers will do it for us, with great biodiversity benefits thrown in. As they're nocturnal, we're unlikely to see the beavers, but you will see the amazing dams and associated wetlands that they produce by working WITH nature, rather than trying in vain to tame something way more powerful.

Mon 11th Aug 7.00 pm Social Meeting. Blacksmith's Arms, Huntington. We have a table booked. Christine Gray.

Sat 16th Aug 9.00 am - 12 noon Footbridge opposite Morrisons. Riverside litterpick in conjunction with York Council boat, Foxy, operating on the river. Please let Tim Rane know if you are joining..

Sat 6th Sep 10.00 am The Bakehouse, Crayke. We are booked in at the Bakehouse for delicious cakes and coffee. Christine Gray.

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Checking the Figures

The River Foss Society accounts for calendar year 2024 were recently presented by the Treasurer at the Annual General meeting on 9 April 2025.

Clive Woolley was thanked for independently checking and confirming the accounts. Total income was £4,658, made up of membership subscriptions, book

sales, refreshment sales, donations, and Christmas lunch sales.

Total expenditure was £4,815. The River Foss Society finances remain healthy with assets at the close of 2024 of £6,955. If anyone has any queries, or wishes a copy of the accounts, please email the RFS Committee via info@riverfossociety.co.uk.

Michael Reakes

On the 15th July the Society will be holding its first meeting to tell members what, as citizen scientists, a group of volunteers is doing to help understand and monitor the health of the river. The media have been busy telling everyone what a poor state British rivers are in and we, in turn, have been doing our bit to expose the problems facing the Foss. Having a small catchment is an advantage, as it allows us with our

The State of the Foss

limited resources to follow the river from source to confluence.

We've been monitoring the Foss for about seven years and have more recently added biological and dissolved oxygen monitoring to give us a much wider view of the river's health. These activities have demonstrated our capabilities and led

to us cooperating with the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water, as well as being involved in several projects with York University, all of which increase our knowledge, and will lead to us being able to employ a wider variety of more accurate and importantly, quality controllable, methods in the future.

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This meeting will show members what we have found out and how we are putting it together in a format which everyone can understand, and which will allow us to bring pressure to bear on the relevant bodies to make improvements. There will be some short presentations of our results and methods followed by a chance to ask questions and engage in discussion. Following that, we'll enjoy tea and coffee and an opportunity to chat informally with other members and with the citizen science volunteers. If you'd like to get involved in any aspect of our monitoring, if you have



A team sampling in the Foss

expertise which could contribute to our understanding, or if you think there is other relevant information we could gather, this is a chance to talk about it.

Remember – this meeting is on Tuesday 15th July at 7.00 pm in the Wigginton Recreation Hall.

Alistair Gray

Starting them Young

On 16th May I met the 52nd York Brownies at St. Andrew's Church, Huntington to walk along the River Foss as they took part in a litter pick. The Brownies had keen eyes, spotting and collecting several sacks worth of rubbish. We talked about how it made them feel sad that some people would not think about the environment as they did.

I took along some information about the wildlife along the river to let the Brownies know that by removing litter they were helping animals survive too. The group thought the water voles and otters were very cute but were fascinated at the thought of bats and dragonflies living so close to them too. We even got a clear sighting of the egret that has been in the area for a while now – none of the Brownies had seen that bird before!

Andy Mulholland



The Brownies had a good time litter picking and learning more about Foss wildlife.

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

Following the path by West Nooks I walked through the estate and past Haxby Weir where I picked up the riverside path again past the back of several houses.

The clouds had truly settled in now, and I realised that the darkening skies had nothing to do with rain, it was getting quite late!

Walking under the ring road bridge felt like a pivotal moment. I definitely knew where I was and wouldn't need to look at my map again. Even though I was still over an hour away from finishing, and my feet were really starting to talk to me, reaching this point gave me a boost. I realised that I was actually going to be able to finish.

Homes backed onto the River Foss more frequently as I reached Huntington, every step taking me nearer to the city. I walked over the neat little brick bridge near All Saints Church and followed the Foss as it arced around towards New Earswick and then past Yearsley baths.

Stepping up and away from the river at the roundabout near Monkgate, I was tantalisingly close to the end point. I was now on roads and following the river for the rest of the journey.

The streetlights were on, and car headlights lit up the road. Daylight was going and darkness was creeping



Passing Rowntree Wharf

in. As I passed Sainsbury's at Foss Bank, I was starting to feel hungry as I began thinking about what I was going to eat for my celebratory dinner.

Sally walks the Foss – new experience Number 22

Part 3 - The Final Stretch

I followed the wooden walkway along the wall of the impressive brick building at Rowntree Wharf. Once a flour mill, the five storeys and focal nine storey water tower are now apartments: probably one of the best industrial buildings in York. Snaking around the back of the Fenwick's building I came out at Clifford's Tower and crossed the car park and was met by my Other Half.

It was after 8.00 pm and I was tired but beaming. I stood under the signpost for the Foss Walk, pointing to Easingwold, 28 miles away. Challenge completed! I'd done it! I'd walked from the source to the end of the River Foss in a day, and it felt like a heck of an achievement. According to Strava, I'd covered 27 miles in nine hours. Aside from the small hill in Crayke, it had been relatively flat, and the loss in elevation was just 331m.

I loved the changing scenery and the kaleidoscope of colours along the way. From being out in the unspoilt countryside to winding up in the city, it had been a fabulous journey. The weather had been kind too. It wouldn't have been much fun if it had rained, or if it had been particularly wet before, making it a muddier and slower walk.

Despite my frustrations at the signage, I am grateful that there were indicators along the route. I also appreciate that they're looked after by volunteers, and that parts of the route are seldom walked. I'm glad I had done my research beforehand though, and knew the directions.

It had been tough going, but with the gorgeous views, a beautiful day and plenty of Werther's Original sweets to keep me going, I'd done it. I didn't move from the sofa after I had showered and put my snuggly pyjamas on, and I slept incredibly well that night!



Finishing after 8.00 pm – tired but happy

Nature Notes

Did you know that we have a feature called 'Nature Notes' which is sent to all members with an email account? The email address is: naturenotes@riverfossociety.co.uk It's intended to share extra bits and bobs and citizen science information.

People who don't follow Facebook or Twitter might not find out about these things so easily. We hope this offers different ways of engaging with the river.

One of last year's listings began:

'Bugs Matter

Bugs Matter is an initiative from Buglife. It started on 1st May and runs until 30th September.

It involves using a "splatometer" to measure insects on your registration plate. The instructions are simple and the app intuitive, making it a quick way to feed into National data. Gone are the days that windscreens and number plates would need a good scrub from splatted insects...'

Sarah Watson

The Rat-Tailed Maggot

or, More Politely, the Common Drone Fly

Not a pleasant name, the Rat-Tailed Maggot (*Eristalis tenax*), but it's perfectly descriptive of the larvae of the Common Drone Fly, a larva we've occasionally found in the Foss from the uppermost site at Oulston down to Yearsley and in between.



Eristalis tenax larva

The reason for the name is the 5cm long, telescopic breathing tube or siphon which allows the larvae to breathe whilst underwater. They live in stagnant, oxygen-depleted but nutrient rich habitats such as slurry lagoons, animal faeces and rotting carcasses, the more foul-smelling and putrid the better, but also in the shallow, muddy areas at the edges of rivers and lakes.

Due to their preferred habitats they need to ensure a constant supply of air in order to survive. The siphon is extended or retracted, maintaining contact with the water surface, depending on where the larvae are feeding on their favoured food of microorganisms and decomposing organic matter which, on a positive note, means they are recycling nutrients within the environment. Tiny hairs at the end of the siphon prevent water from entering. The cylindrical shape of the larvae ensures efficient movement through water, the body contracting to propel the larvae forward to find food and avoid predators. They also have a well-developed sensitivity to their surroundings, including an efficient visual field, which allows them to navigate, detect minute changes in water temperature, the presence of food sources and potential predators. Having said that they are food for birds, fish, amphibians and invertebrate predators such as the Water Scorpion, mentioned in our last Newsletter.

As they mature, the larvae leave the water, each larva

forms a protective case and then undergoes metamorphosis into the pupal stage, which is reddish-brown in colour with horn-like projections at the front through which the pupa breathes although the siphon remains in place.



So its looks, its preferred habitats and its feeding behaviour ensure the Rat-Tailed Maggot *Eristalis tenax* pupa. has few admirers! But, when the adults emerge as Common Drone Flies, medium-sized

Photo: G Bradley UKsafari.com

hoverflies that are excellent Honeybee mimics hence the name drone fly, they become essential pollinators. Not only do they resemble Honeybee drones (males) in looks, but they also match their flight behaviour to that of Honeybees in order to protect themselves



Adult Drone fly. Photo: H A Peacock Naturespot.org

from predators. Hoverflies have no sting unlike bees. They feed on nectar and can be seen all year in our gardens, hedges and fields and emerging from hibernation to feed on Ivy flowers on mild winter days.

It is possible to create a lagoon for the larvae by filling a container with small pieces of wood, cuttings and leaves from the garden, filling it with water and leaving it to stand. The female Drone flies will find it, lay their eggs and you can watch the larvae develop and eventually emerge as adults to help pollinate the flowers in your garden and beyond. The University of Sussex is running a citizen science project on Hoverfly Lagoons, details here: [Hoverfly Lagoons | Buzz Club](#). Don't be put off by the looks and habits of the Rat-Tailed Maggot, just think of those magnificent and urgently needed hoverfly pollinators!

Barbara Hilton

Spring Cleaning

We completed the first RFS litter pick of 2025 on the 5th April. Twelve volunteers met at the Blue Bridge on Foss Islands and worked from 9.00 am till noon.

Overall the litter collected from the river banks and surroundings was around 15 -20 green bags and two one tonne blue sacks. Some of the green bags were filled on route and left by the public bins to make transporting easier. The rest of the litter which the group collected was transferred onto Council boat Foxy and then onto the Council's van for disposal.

It had been reported that some supermarket trolleys and a bike were seen in the river further upstream. We



cannot get that far upstream on Foxy, so these were recovered on the following Sunday. This was then reported for removal to recycling.

Tim Rane

Keeping things Clean

On 14th June 10 volunteers showed up for our latest litter pick. Three volunteers crewed Foxy, the York Council boat, while the others worked on the shore crew picking litter from the banks. As is shown on the photos we had a large haul of six trolleys and three bikes plus lots of other rubbish making 15-20 bags worth. We also found a council sign and fishing equipment.



The team at Castle Mills Lock after a successful session

We also sailed Foxy as far as we could to the sewer pipe at Foss Bridge to remove a blockage of fallen branches, which was a litter capture point. It's flowing nicely now. Overall, this was a successful litter pick, albeit hard work, but we all felt rewarded by what we had recovered.

Then, on the 20th June we recovered more bikes from the river after a member of the public reported at least one in the water by Hungate. However, we found seven! As the water is clear they are easier to see in the deep water there.

Tim Rane



A packed lorry



Foxy is well loaded



Seven bikes recovered from the Foss!

On a sunny May morning a dozen RFS members and public joined Maria Gill of St. Nicks on an amble from Yearsley Baths to Huntington Road. On the way Maria spoke about the Green Corridors project being run by St. Nicks in conjunction with the RFS, the Internal Drainage Board, York St. John (who own the land by the sports field) and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The

The Foss Green Corridor – What’s Happening



Maria Gill fills us in on the Green Corridors Project

aim is for all parties to liaise in managing York’s green corridors, to co-ordinate work and ensure we’re all “on the same page”.

Maria explained that her group of volunteers work from two “hubs” on alternate Wednesdays – the York St. John sports field and West Nooks, Haxby. The riv-

erbanks are being mown on a rotation basis – the upper banks earlier in the year to prevent invasive species spreading downwards, then the lower banks – different sections each year. It’s hoped that this, together with the ongoing mink trapping programme, will improve the habitat for water voles. We saw where scrapes, or hollows, have been dug into the lower banks as an experiment, to trap water when the Foss is high and store it for use by wildlife in times of low water. We also heard about the tansy beetle programme, the plan being to plant more tansy to close the gaps between existing plants.

Stands of Himalayan balsam were already visible on private gardens on the east bank. Last summer Maria’s team approached householders for permission to clear it, with a generally good response, and also cleared the banks from the water wearing waders. Everyone agrees that it’s best to start pulling as far up-

stream as possible, but this will be a long-term project due to the complexities of rural land ownership.

Questions were asked and lively discussions took place, so that the amble stretched past the allotted hour. We were sorry to leave Maria at Huntington Road and make our way home.

Alison Scott

Metal Attraction

Keeping the River Foss flowing is our key objective, and we are grateful to anyone who volunteers to help us achieve it, but in recent years we have seen discarded metal and rubbish left along the sides of the river bank and received complaints about this.

It’s due to a craze which developed rapidly during Covid times, with the popularity of You Tube to promote it to the masses and the availability of large Neodymium Magnets at affordable prices. Magnet fishing, as it is called, is where people trawl the river bottoms in search of metal debris left over from years gone by. The lure of finding a Roman sword, a discarded wartime gun or a safety deposit box full of stolen currency is attracting many people to this new hobby.

The reality is that it’s very rare to find anything worth

keeping and much of what is recovered is worthless, unless you deal in scrap metal. The mess left behind for others to clean up is a frustrating result of this otherwise interesting hobby. The things which can cause problems for the river are bikes and supermarket trolleys as blockages can build up which stop the river flowing, or can snag the propeller of our beloved Foxy, the Council’s river boat, which we use to cleanse the river once per quarter of litter and debris. So we are always happy to see these removed as it’s a lot of effort to get them out of the river ourselves, and they are not easy to find when the river is silty.



Absolute rubbish!

The perfect approach would be that all metal rubbish is removed and taken to the closest recycling centre, or is consolidated close to a public road and reported to the Council for clearance. Or hopefully a scrap metal dealer will drive by, load their van up and weigh it in. So we support responsible magnet fishing, to help us keep the river clean and tidy.

Tim Rane

On 10 June, a group of 20 RFS members set out from the car park at Huntington church for a wild flower amble along the River Foss, led by Margaret Atherden. The aim of this walk was to help people identify some of the common plants to be found in this area, rather than to compile a comprehensive record of all of them.

We started on the west bank by looking at some of the dominant grasses, e.g. Cock's-foot, False Oat-grass and the tall Reed Canary-grass. Two shorter grasses that are also easy to identify were Yorkshire-Fog and Perennial Rye Grass. We also noted two common members of the parsley family: Cow Parsley (or Queen Anne's Lace, which was in seed) and Hogweed. As we approached the ring road there was an impressive stand of Hemlock, with red blotches on the stem, which is poisonous and should not be touched. Lining the steep banks of the river were extensive stands of Himalayan Balsam. May and early June are good times to pull up this invasive annual before it flowers.

We noted the difference between Spear Thistle and Creeping Thistle, between Meadow Buttercup and Creeping Buttercup and between Greater Plantain and Ribwort Plantain. Goat's-beard, with its large clock-like seed heads, was an occasional find. In the hedgerows, the Many-flowered Rose

(a naturalised garden escapee with sprays of white flowers) was compared with the single-flowered pink Dog Rose. As we crossed the foot bridge at Old Ear-

swick, we saw a large stand of Butterbur, whose large rounded leaves develop after the flowers have gone.

The most interesting section of the walk was the grassland area on the high terrace on the east side of the river. Here we found Cowslips (in seed), Water Avens, Ragged Robin, Common Spotted-orchid, Bird's-foot Trefoil, False Fox Sedge and the beautiful red pea-like flowers of Grass Vetchling. Later in the year, Lesser Knapweed (or Hardheads) and Common Fleabane will bloom there. Two grasses to compare were Meadow Foxtail (now going over) and Timothy (just starting to flower).

As we walked south towards the car park, we noted Great Willowherb (or Codlins and Cream), Meadowsweet, Ground-ivy (a small blue flower, not an ivy at all) and the white flowers of Large Bindweed. At the foot of the roadside fence was Ground-elder – detested by gardeners but quite attractive in flower.

These are just some of the plants to be seen at this time of year. Earlier or later in the season other species will have their moment in the sun. There is always something interesting to be seen along the Foss.

Margaret Atherden

A wild flower amble



Margaret shows a sample of prickly sow thistle



Taking in useful knowledge



Find us on X (Formerly Twitter) at @riverfossyork



And we're on Facebook, too!

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

On the Foss

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