



Would you like to try something different? Something which will help the riverbanks and the river be a healthier place for wildlife – and for us. Some of it will be hard work and some of it will be more cerebral, but all of it will be fulfilling and (hopefully) fun.

The RFS is being encouraged to take on a wider role, something more akin to the original purposes of our organisation which started out as the River Foss Amenity Society. Our biological and chemical monitoring has shown what we can do, and we've seen how our efforts are appreciated by the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water et al, but here's a chance not only to do more, but to do it in the company of like-minded fellow members and in parallel with river groups all over Yorkshire.

We've got some great volunteers who have made possible gathering the results to date, but if we are to step up to this challenge we'll need more.

Could you be one of them?

The roles will be many and varied. As well as getting muddy boots and hands, we'll need people to plan, fund-raise, evaluate, and, critically, organise ourselves. To get us going we need a couple of volunteer coordinators. Can you help? This could be an ideal role for someone who doesn't fancy the muddy bit, but

**The River Foss
needs YOU!**

would like to make a significant contribute to our efforts.

Who else do we need?

Anyone with the time and the energy to help improve the river's environment.

Do you know (or would you like to learn more) about plants, insects, water quality, biodiversity management, agricultural legislation? These and many more are areas in which we'll need to get involved.

"If you want a job done well, ask a busy person!" So, we're asking you.....!

You'll find small features describing each area of activity around this issue.

To find out more or to put your name forward, here are the contacts:

Green Corridors – Mike Gray
– events@riverfossociety.co.uk

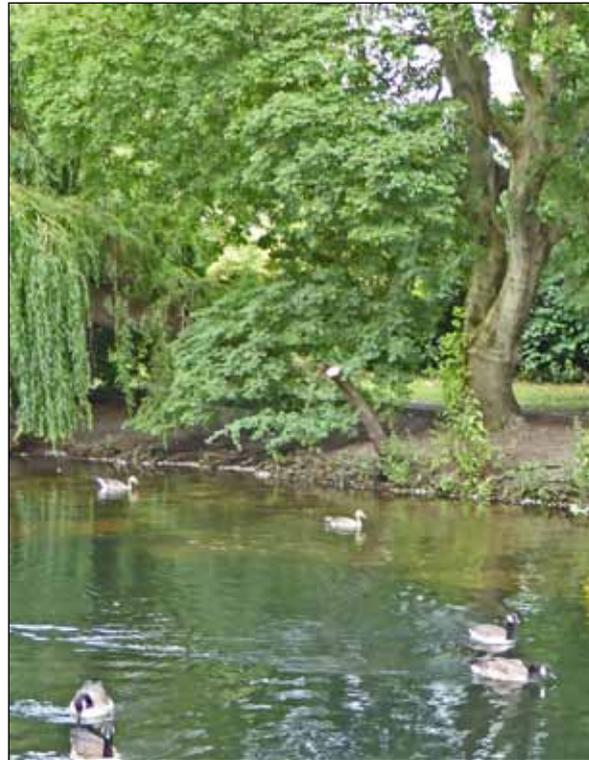
AQuA - Alistair Gray - aqua@riverfossociety.co.uk

Balsam control – Paul Wilson - paul.338wilson@btinternet.com

Kick sampling – Barbara Hilton - barbara_hilton@msn.com

Or if you are happy to volunteer where help is most needed it's ??????

Mike Gray



Christmas Celebrations

Our Christmas Lunch on 7 December started with an excellent talk on 'Fossils of Yorkshire' by Liam Herringshaw. He came across as so enthusiastic and succeeded in passing that enthusiasm and interest to his audience!

Afterwards we enjoyed pre-dinner canapes and mulled

wine before taking our seats for an excellent meal served by staff who found nothing too much trouble.



We finished the meal with tea and coffee accompanied by delicious fruity Christmas pudding and mini mince pies.

This lovely day made a perfect start to the holiday season.

Our first social event of 2025 was a meal out at Manzano, an Italian restaurant overlooking the Foss on Fossgate. As we needed to book a table this event was open to the first dozen responders! Both the food and the company were excellent on the evening. (In fact, it was so successful that we have booked a table again this year:

Wednesday, 25 February at 7.00 pm. Contact me on membership@riverfossociety.co.uk or on phone 01904 621808 to book a place)

We try to have our social gatherings 'on the Foss'. Our first Pub evening was in The Black Swan, Peaseholme Green, in June. We met there again in October, as it is large enough for any number who want to come, while still being cosy for only a few. We are planning to re-visit later in 2026.

The other pub we visited last year was the Blacksmith's Arms, Huntington. There is no need to let anyone know if you want to come along to these evenings – someone from the Committee will be there to welcome you!

In July we held a meeting to enable new mMembers

Enjoyable times

to come and meet the Committee and others in the Society. We had stalls displaying history and wildlife along the Foss, as well

as the macro-invertebrates that one can find within the river. However, the highlight of the evening was a presentation put together by one of our members, Roger Button, of 'Then' and 'Now' photographs along



Lively discussion at the Blacksmith's Arms, Huntington



Meeting for cake and coffee at the Bakehouse at Crayke

the Foss. These had been donated by Mr Paul Thorpe.

The Bakehouse at Crayke, the most upstream of our 'on the Foss' social destinations, is becoming an annual treat. By saying that I hope I haven't jinxed the good weather we enjoy there! We were there on a Saturday morning at the beginning of September, for super cakes, coffee

and chat.

We are currently putting together some pub/restaurant/coffee shop dates for our members in 2026. Keep an eye out for notifications.

Christine Gray



Find us on X (Formerly Twitter) at @riverfossyork



And we're on Facebook, too!

AQuA – citizen science with York University

Extending our sampling of the river water e.g. phosphates, ammonia, coliforms, to build a picture of the river's health using both proven and innovative methods as part of a countywide project. Providing full training and support is a major part of this package.

We'll select around 15 sites along the river to be sampled monthly for a couple of years, after which a smaller number of sites will be selected for continuing checks.

Contact: Alistair Gray - aqua@riverfossociety.co.uk

For many years I took part in the British Trust for Ornithology's monthly Wetlands Bird Survey (WeBS) at Gouthwaite reservoir up beyond Pateley Bridge.

Its purpose is to count waders and waterbirds, principally in the winter months. Counts ranged up to a couple of thousand birds, mainly Lapwings and Teal. As an alternative nearer to home, I decided to do a count along the Foss, too, and chose the length between Huntington Church and the abrupt end of the path at West Nooks. In an ideal world that path would



Water rails have wintered at Earswick

continue as far as Towthorpe bridge – we can only dream!

Be that as it may, it was indeed a real contrast. My first walk, in September 2010 resulted in a count of three – one Moorhen and a pair of Mallards! The second in October

was better – Coot, Grey Heron, Mallard, Moorhen, plus an optional count of a Black-headed Gull.

That stretch of the river is better than many for waterbirds with at least some cover on the banks, though back then the Drainage Board used to flail the bankside vegetation several times year. Now that they don't we seem to have more waterbirds, though at times the vegetation is too high to see them.

I suspect that it's only the early morning dog-walkers who really know what is around – WeBS surveys are done starting well before 8am, assuming it's light enough to see, for the same reason. I will admit to only getting out early for the survey, so I make no claim to be aware of the river's many visitors, but there certainly are some interesting birds around, though

you often need to know where to look. I'm grateful to several members of the public who have told me about interesting birds along the river – they are not always still there when I arrive.....

Surveying Wetlands Birds Along the Foss

My favourite is a Water Rail which overwintered by Earswick for a few years – a secretive bird more often heard than seen. It's a bit like a smaller stripey brown Moorhen. Apart from that there are some Goosanders which seem

to come back most winters and can be seen in various places. These handsome diving ducks are a member of the sawbill family, named for their serrated bills which allow them to hold onto slithery fish.

The iconic Kingfisher is not uncommon along the Foss. There are several territories which tend to be about a mile long - and they are usually seen as a flash of iridescent blue – only rarely are we lucky enough to see one perching. Needless to say, I've yet to see one during a survey.

It's going to be interesting to find out which birds visit the newly created 'wildlife' areas around the new flood alleviation area above Strensall. There are scrapes and selectively planted areas intended to attract a variety of creatures, though it's nigh on impossible to see much, even now before the vegetation really gets going.



Goosanders are regular winter visitors

I'd like to add a bird section to the website, so I'm keen to hear about – and even better, have photos of – what you've seen during your walks, or from the bottom of your gardens.

Mike Gray

Introducing our Membership Secretary – Christine Gray

I'm the one who tries to keep the Membership list up-to-date, and encourages you to pay your subscriptions early in the year! (NB: it's renewal time for 2026: £12 for an adult, £10 senior, £21 household – remember to let me know when you have paid!)

I've been living by the River Foss in York for the past 10 years or so and am often to be found walking with Rosie-the-dog. Please say 'Hi!' if you see us.

(PS I'm no relation to Mike Gray, just in case you were wondering)



Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Surveying Foss Outfalls for University-led Study (AQuA)

A group of 12 RFS volunteers has been surveying pipes, ditches, drains and other outfalls into the Foss as part of a University of York-led study that seeks to find solutions to contaminants in Yorkshire's waterbodies. The Action for Quality Aquatic Environments (AQuA) Project will use information from the outfall surveys on nine water bodies to define 140 locations across Yorkshire for sampling for chemical and microbial contaminants. Samples from the Foss will be taken and analysed by volunteers at about 20 locations, four times a year for two years. The project is funded to £1.6 million by the Natural Environment Research Council in a major push to engage citizen scientists in ground-breaking research to help plug knowledge gaps in river health. The results will help characterise the water quality and help explain the relative impacts on biodiversity of road runoff, farming, sewage treatment and combined sewer overflows across the Foss catchment area.



Some of our members are helping with AQuA's survey of the Foss

Partners in the project include community groups across Yorkshire, the Rivers Trust, councils, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and the University of Leeds. As part of the project the University of York is studying the effectiveness of new solutions on pollution. An example of this will be the monitoring of the Ilkley Wetlands Project, led by Yorkshire Water. That will use a constructed wetland to further improve treated wastewater and reduce overflows into the River Wharfe with an aim of improving bathing waters and local biodiversity.

Although the Foss outfall survey is nearing completion, the sampling and analytical phase of the project will not start until May this year. New volunteers are very welcome, and if you would like to find out more, please email me on aqua@riverfossociety.co.uk.

Alistair Gray

Himalayan Balsam – control with St Nicks

- Continuing our work in preventing large areas of monoculture balsam consolidating and spreading.
- Tackling large areas of nettles, again with the intent to improve biodiversity.

Contact:

Paul Wilson: paul.338wilson@btinternet.com

On 11 October, our last litter pick of 2025, 10 people showed up, three to work on the boat, and seven for ground crew working on the footpaths. The ground crew did very well, as normal.

A baffling find!

However, this time the boat crew really struggled because the boat has no steering at the moment, so we could only go forward. We hope that the Council will be able to get it fixed in time for our first litter pick of 2026.

Even with the steering problems, we managed to recover a motorcycle and reported it to the Police, who came out to look at it. We also recovered a bike.

And then, would you believe it, we also found four, yes four, ukuleles! We're still trying to understand that one. Any ideas?

Tim Rane



The haul included a motorcycle and four ukuleles!

Members visited Cropton Forest in August 2025 to learn about the Slowing the Flow project which aims to store potential flood waters within the middle reaches of Pickering Beck and the River Seven to significantly reduce flooding in Pickering and downstream villages. We also learnt about the effect the addition of a beaver family has had on the project.

Slowing the Flow

Mike Potter, an integral figure from the inception of the project and through its development, explained the initial trials and tribulations and how the work has moved on from these in many positive ways. The project has been "hailed as a big success" by Forestry England. Beavers are now part of it and doing their bit to help.



The group from RFS were told about the project by Mike Potter

Leaky dams, made from appropriate felled timber and installed by Forest Research, are a natural flood management technique which slows water movement in streams and rivers, therefore reducing flood peaks downstream, and are part of the Slowing the Flow project.

A pair of beavers were introduced in 2019 to a 10 ha enclosure, including 800m of Sutherland Beck and two old Victorian ponds, to see if they would build on these dams. The female produced two kits shortly afterwards with eighteen kits born since with a number now having been rehomed. The Cropton beavers have been industrious. They ignored the man-made leaky dams and built their own, including the longest in the UK, measuring 70m in length and 2.3m high, along with numerous smaller ones.

Not only are they providing opportunities for various research projects at five universities, but the speed of water passing through the site has reduced and local biodiversity has increased significantly e.g. six clumps of frogspawn were counted before the beaver introduction in 2019. However there was an uncountable number in 2020, providing food for herons, otters, badgers and owls.



Evidence of beaver activity



An efficient leaky dam

Bat activity has increased four-fold and Noctule bats are present after a 30-year absence. The beavers' tree-felling activities have opened up glades within the woodland allowing native flora to flourish alongside aquatic plants in the ponds and wetland areas, leading to increased numbers of invertebrates. So far, lots of positives for this project and the beavers, so many that other places across the country are looking to develop similar projects.

Barbara Hilton

Green Corridors – biodiversity enhancement with St Nicks

- A score of small sites along the riverbanks have been identified which possibly need improving. We'll be surveying and identifying what we have - plants, insects, birds and mammals.
- Followed by clearing, pruning, planting as necessary, and then maintenance.
- Surveying the land between this score of sites, finding out who the owners are, and working with those who are willing to see how they could be joined up – maybe hedges, shrubs, trees etc.
- Finding out what funds are available to pay for the work plus any training needed – ELM (Environmental Land Management – a way for farmers to get paid for farming in a way which benefits the environment), sponsorship, grants etc.

Contact: Mike Gray – events@riverfossociety.co.uk

This winter, a group of Ring-necked parakeets seems to have taken up residence on the Foss, around Willow Bank in New Earswick and across into Huntington. You may have seen them elsewhere, but this is my patch and so I am very aware of them.

A new arrival for the Foss?

They are wonderfully striking birds and their vivid colours stand out on grey January days. They're also very sociable and (so I'm told!) very noisy. Whether they are here to stay remains to be seen but they are definitely expanding nationally and my guess is that we shall be seeing a lot more of them. How should we respond?

It's hard not to feel a slight thrill when a group of these brilliantly-coloured birds flies over or you



Ring-necked parakeets make a stunning contrast to our foliage. Photo: Sarah Kelman, BTO.

see them prospecting for nesting holes in the old willows by the river. They seem to be an attractive addition to our fauna, but where they have become fully established, especially in the south-east, there are potential problems. Ring-necked parakeets come from India. They were probably originally escapes or deliberate releases from the pet trade and that may continue, but they are very successfully breeding. They nest in holes and compete with native species for those holes; because they nest early in the year – and are large and competitive – they tend to come out on top. In India they are a major cause of agricultural crop losses and they may well become a serious problem here too, though that

doesn't seem to be the case yet: they certainly enjoy eating buds of winter-flowering shrubs in my garden! There's a worry too that they may carry and spread bird diseases.

So are they an attractive addition to our bird fauna or a potential serious problem? They are in many ways the winged equivalent of Himalayan balsam, which we have definitely decided is a bad thing, even though it is similarly attractive, even in some ways beneficial (at least to bee-keepers) and – oddly – also from India. Neither has obvious enemies: there is currently an effort to control Himalayan balsam using a parasitic fungus brought from its native range. Nothing really is currently a threat to the parakeets: goshawks are thought to be potential predators (when did you last see one of those on the Foss?).



A ring-necked parakeet takes advantage of a bird feeder. Photo: Tom Cadwallader, BTO.

There is a school of thought which tells us not to worry about these invasive non-native species: we should accept that biodiversity is changing and always will, and that these invaders will eventually attract predators and parasites and become less dominant. I don't think anyone wants to try to get rid of all non-native species – and why would we? However, in their expansive phase, they may seriously reduce populations of other species and some of those might not recover.

Alastair Fitter

The Foss footpath from Strensall to Lilling/Sheriff Hutton remains closed. This is due to "structural issues" with the tubular steel footbridge at position GR 6482 :



Footbridge repairs delayed

6221, close to the Foss Barrier.

Repairs were due to be completed on December 24th 2025, but the opening date is now been moved to 26th July 2026.

The alternative footpath route to Lilling/Sheriff Hutton is to take the footpath off the Sheriff Hutton road to Duncombe farm; this brings you out on the other side of the bridge under repair.

John Millett

Macroinvertebrate monitoring

Barbara Hilton still needs more volunteers to continue her well established and much appreciated "kick-testing" when volunteers gather and identify the occupants of the riverbed. It's addictive!

Contact: barbara_hilton@msn.com

On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125
email: york.beth2@gmail.com

Secretary: Helen Button
email: info@riverfossociety.co.uk

Membership: Christine Gray
Tel. 01904 621808
email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk