



On the Foss

**Autumn
2026**

News from The River Foss Society

Water sampling for the Action for Quality Aquatic Environments (AQuA) project is finally underway!

Ten groups of intrepid citizen scientists from the River Foss Society, St Nicks and Ouse It Or Lose It, sampled 24 sites on a sunny day at the tail end of the dry summer, in late August. This included 20 sites on the Foss and four on the Ouse. Sampling in the Foss catchment area covers from Oulston in the north, to York city centre and also includes eight tributaries. These samples were taken as part of the University of York-led AQuA project's quarterly sampling programme of 104 locations across Yorkshire; this runs until summer 2028.

Earlier in the summer AQuA volunteers from across North Yorkshire attended a training day at the Department of Environment and Geography to ensure sampling protocols and analytical routines for E. coli and Phosphate were correctly followed. Five further training sessions were run by the River Foss Society for our members, and for colleagues from St Nicks and Ouse It Or Lose It.

Preliminary results were immediately available for Phosphate and E. coli, while a further 70 parameters will be analysed in the University of York labs by November.

High phosphate readings were seen on all the becks, including those above Haxby Walbutts Sewage Treatment Works, and at all locations on the

AQuA is underway!



Foss downstream of Haxby-Walbutts STW. Low phosphate readings were seen at all sites on the Foss upstream of Haxby-Walbutts STW. On the Ouse phosphate was lower than the downstream portion of the Foss.

E. coli is measured in Colony Forming Units per 100ml (CFU/100 ml). Bathing water should be below 900 CFU/100 ml for river swimming, and it was above this cutoff at Oulston Ford, Howl Beck, South Beck, and Tang Hall Beck. All sites, on the Foss, except Oulston Ford,

were below 900 CFU/100 ml, including, happily, Blue Bridge where Ouse It Or Lose It swim.

The E. coli and Phosphate results are preliminary, and represent a single summer snapshot, and a more robust picture will emerge with the lab analysis and further sampling.

There has been a very significant contribution from volunteers during sampling, analysis, and in the planning phase of the project, which is hugely appreciated. Our next sampling is in late November, and new volunteers are always welcome – contact: aqua@riverfossociety.co.uk.

Alistair Gray

Top: Getting ready to sample on Hungate Bridge

Middle row left: Working with samples

Middle row right: AQuA training on a footbridge over the Foss

Bottom: Starting to sample



Autumn Adventures

OCTOBER

Wed 14th Oct 7.00 pm Strensall Village Hall Open meeting. Speaker Mike Potter: 'Flowing with the Flow – Beavers. The beaver release above Pickering.' John Millett

Sat 17th Oct 9.00 am -12.00 noon Footbridge opposite Morrisons Riverside litterpick in conjunction with Foxy operating on the river. Please let Tim know if you are joining. Tim Rane

Thur 22nd Oct 7.00 pm Blue Barbakan, Walmgate Evening meal – booking essential by Oct 7th please. Christine Gray

NOVEMBER

Wed 18th Nov 10.00 am - 12.00 noon Hungate Social gathering. Christine Gray

DECEMBER

Sunday 11.30 am - 2.30 pm 11:30 am - 2:30 pm Christmas Lunch preceded by a talk on fish in the Foss by Steve Axford, Events@riverfossociety.co.uk

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THE BIG C IS COMING, READY OR NOT!!

River Foss Society Christmas Lunch

Lunch will be preceded by a talk on
'Fish in the Foss' by Steve Axford

Booking will start at the Open Meeting on 14 October

I was born in Zambia, where, over 50 years ago, I was introduced to my future husband Peter on Christmas night – and clearly it turned out rather well! Peter's work gave us the opportunity to travel and live in many different countries. I have always felt we were privileged to have experienced different cultures and ways of life, and wherever we lived, I tried to give something back through charity work, fundraising and local groups.

We have two children and five grandchildren. Our son lives in New Zealand and our daughter is currently living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, so our love of travel has certainly been passed on! We love spending time with our family.

What do I like to do? Gardening, reading, writing, painting, music, knitting, swimming and cycling.

I have always loved meeting people and talking to strangers. Some of my most interesting conversations have been with taxi drivers, shop assistants, people

from many walks of life – people whose voices can sometimes be overlooked. I find their honesty and insights into life refreshing and fascinating.

*Introducing our newest
committee member*

Lynette Mills



After retiring, Peter and I had a narrowboat built and spent five years travelling the waterways of England and Wales. We had some hairy experiences, lots of laughs and saw many beautiful places, whilst learning about English history.

Returning to York led us to join the River Foss Society, as we live right next to the river. We have learnt about water quality, balsam bashing and kick sampling, and I absolutely love finding cased caddis! Over time Peter and I have become increasingly involved along with others in raising awareness of the River Foss. I feel privileged to work alongside so many dedicated people and, as I take over the

social events from Mike Gray, I hope I can maintain the high standard he has set and give something back to a Society that has already given us so much.



It is with sadness that we have to say farewell to Bob Jowett, a member of the River Foss Society for over 20 years. I and the friends who knew him well have many happy memories of Bob's enthusiasm, not least for the many walks he led along the River Foss, the importance he placed on keeping the paths open and checking

the signage. He was keen to keep the paths walked and maintain the state of the stiles. He also liaised with local footpath authorities to ensure that 'rights of way' were up to date. He was an RFS committee member for many years and was never afraid to have his say.

Bob's zest for life knew no bounds and his interests were many and varied - running, walking, square dancing, camping, caravanning, photography, bridge, motorbikes and practical pursuits. He even made his own grandfather clock (definitely not from a kit!)

Of course, we know of his involvement with the RFS. He also spoke with pride of his time working as a project engineer at Rowntree, now Nestle, and was always ready for a chat, mainly about his family who

A Fond Farewell

were central to his life, with anyone who had plenty of time.

Bob was kind and generous, a man of faith, who worshipped at St Nicholas church, Wigginton for many years. Bob found happiness in his latter years with Maureen and



together they enjoyed the outside life, travelling in his motor home or caravan.

Thank you, Bob, for who you were, for making us smile and for your dedication to the RFS. Our sympathy to Maureen and to Bob's family.

Anne Bednarski

Our litter pick for 1 August was poorly attended, with only six volunteers showing up. Again, this is again lower than normal and it's difficult to see why. Foxy again was not available, this time because the engine was overheating which they were blaming on the volume of duckweed. They said that a new part is needed, and Foxy would be fixed for Saturday 8 August. So, we could use the boat then if we want to take it out.

We set off in two ground teams to collect what rubbish we could from the sides of the river. At the same time we also started filming with the drone to get footage of the ground crews. We are hoping to continue this when we get access to Foxy.

The Gazebo event was also filmed as part of the video footage. Once we have all the footage, we will do a voice-over. Barbara and I have agreed to do it, and I would like another from the committee if possible. Volunteers are welcome! This is first to talk about the work we do for the RFS, and second, to put in a call for volunteers to help us further.

If the video is good, then we can put it on the website. The more contributions we get in terms of content, the better. We have to accept that in today's world, video content is more powerful than words to get the message across. Many thanks to volunteer Vinnie who has agreed to do the videography for free; it's an opportunity that I didn't want to miss.

Tim Rane

Pedestrian Litter



Our team did a fantastic job collecting litter

Most people (there are exceptions) love the Common Frog, *Rana temporaria*, our most recognizable amphibian, common across the UK and found in damp habitats in spring where water bodies suitable for breeding are close by. During the rest of the year, they can be found in gardens, meadows and woodland, roaming up to 500m from their breeding pond. In winter they hibernate underground in mammal burrows, under logs or somewhere warm like a compost heap, protected from extreme cold but remaining damp, emerging on warmer days for food. Some adult male frogs will spend winter in mud at the bottom of ponds, risking death due to lack of oxygen if the pond freezes over, but this strategy gives them the advantage of being ready and waiting for the first female arrivals in spring.

Spawning takes place during early spring, the males croaking to attract a mate and competing with other males. Once a mate is chosen, the male climbs on top of the female, holds her with swollen nuptial pads on his forelegs, keeping his rear feet poised ready to fend off attack from a competing male. The female will lay up to 4,000 eggs in a single clump, which are immediately fertilised by the male, usually early in the morning in shallow water. Depending on temperature but generally after three weeks, tadpoles emerge. Initially they will live off the egg yolk but, after a few days, they will start to eat algae. By week four, as their hind legs develop, they will eat small invertebrates and, occasionally, other tadpoles, becoming completely carnivorous by weeks 12 to 16 as they become froglets.

An adult frog's colour can vary considerably, most being brown, olive green or grey with irregular dark patterns and spots. They measure 8 – 13cm in length, with the females being larger than the males. Their diet consists mainly of slugs and snails, so they are a friend to gardeners. Their diet also includes worms and flies.

Fossil evidence shows that frog ancestors were living 250 million years ago. They might have been one of Egypt's plagues, but the ancient Egyptians saw them as a fertility symbol, as did the Greeks and Romans. Frogs have been part of myth and

folklore for millennia: the Celts regarded them as a master of the earth, with curative and cleansing powers; early Christian tradition linked their three stages of development with the Trinity, spiritual enlightenment and resurrection; Buddhism saw frogs as a symbol of good luck and Sanskrit mythology endowed them with command of the functioning of the earth and believed they were responsible for bringing the night.

We possibly take them for granted, unless you see your own garden frog numbers decrease over recent years as I have. Common Frog numbers have declined in both the UK and Europe. Loss of breeding habitat is a big factor, with increasing numbers of

ponds filled for development; one third of UK ponds have disappeared over the past 50 years. Frogs are frequently killed on roads when travelling to breeding sites and the often-deadly disease, Ranavirus, causing skin sores, blisters, and internal bleeding is another contributor to their decline with climate change worsening its severity and spread. Areas in which frogs can keep cool, such as rock and log piles, gaps under paving slabs, tall plants, piles of leaves and ponds, could help frogs fight off the infection. These also provide spaces for winter shelter, opportunities to escape from predators and places to forage for food.

You can help our frogs by creating a pond in your garden to provide them with an ideal place to breed. It doesn't need to be large. Garden ponds, of any size, are extremely important as many frog populations in

suburban areas depend on them. As ponds disappear, so do our frogs.

To end on a positive note, we have one other native frog, the Northern Pool Frog, *Pelophylax lessonae*, considered to be extinct in the UK but non-native before the mid - 90s when Pool Frog bones from mid-Saxon times were uncovered, along with records documenting the species' presence in England prior to any known frog introductions. It has been reintroduced in Norfolk and is also found at Tophill Low Nature Reserve on the River Hull near Driffield, owned and managed by Yorkshire Water, and, appropriately, the main site for Northern Pool Frog in the North of England.

Barbara Hilton

Are you a Batrachophile? Or more obviously, a Frogophile?



This Foss froglet was found earlier this autumn. John Terenzini took the photo of the little frog sitting on Barbara's thumbnail.



Barbara caught this photo in her garden of a frog struggling to eat an oversized worm

Local Nature Recovery Strategies have not exactly hit the headlines, though they have been talked about in lots of TV programmes and magazine articles. They are intended to be an important step in working out what needs to be done to plan a revival of the local environment, and the River Foss Society has been involved in helping to build the York module, led by the Stockholm Institute (York University) and St Nicks.

Important Strategies for Nature

Agency from its records and mapping data, as part of a 'Mitigation Measures Assessment' programme. This would be aimed at identifying possible actions to reduce the pressures on our rivers.

Is this duplication, silo thinking or complementary action?

Latterly, the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (YDRT) has asked us to look at several locations, identified by the Environment

Each LNRS is prepared and overseen by an appointed local authority – also referred to as the 'responsible authority' working with local partner organisations to agree priorities and actions for improving nature in the area. (N Yorkshire & York in our case)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-nature-recovery-strategies/local-nature-recovery-strategies>)

The RFS has long been involved in the Foss Green Corridors project led by St Nicks. Back in 2020 St Nicks commissioned Ann Hansen to carry out a survey along the Foss looking at how the various small patches of biodiverse land could be connected to produce a corridor along the river. This is not a simple matter, as the river is only a narrow strip of land and water bordered by farmland and housing, making such



The Foss below Earswick – the hedge could be improved to connect to the next copse.

What is an LNRS?

England is widely considered to be one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world following long-term declines. The government has made legally-binding commitments to stop this deterioration and allow nature to recover.

Local nature recovery strategies (LNRSs) are locally-led strategies that bring people and organisations together to plan and take targeted action for nature recovery and environmental improvement.

Each strategy:

- *identifies key environmental issues that it will focus on*
- *sets out actions that contribute to tackling those issues*
- *proposes locations where these actions will have the greatest impact*

There are 48 strategy areas which together cover the whole of England. Each strategy is published online by the local authority that led its preparation.

Actions proposed within an LNRS are not legally binding. However, progress in delivering the proposed actions is monitored, and landowners and land managers are encouraged, supported and incentivised to deliver them.

How local nature recovery strategies are prepared

connections difficult. Her report identified 25 areas that could potentially be connected and formed the basis of the LNRS plan which we worked on.

This is all very much 'work in progress' and will require a lot more effort before it becomes a plan, and this is only the start, as landowner and community involvement will be needed to make it a reality. Funding is another question. An LNRS is a statutory requirement, but no funding has been allocated to deliver it! It will require some ingenuity to sort this out. There is government funding for farmers, for instance Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), but they will not be quick or simple, as well as various environmental funding streams and maybe Lottery funding. All of this will require expertise and a lot of effort.

This is very much work in progress and the Society will continue its efforts to make sure that the Foss is included in the strategy when it is finalised. We can then use it as the basis of a range of projects to build a Foss Green Corridor. If any members would like to get involved in building the Green Corridor plans, please let me know – expertise and energy are always needed!

Mike Gray

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



We got this motorbike out during an earlier litter pick, but could not collect it, so it has stayed on Foxy

Water picking!

On our 'water only' litter pick on 16 August, we had a lot of problems with Foxy as the engine kept cutting out. This engine is probably under-sized for its application and ideally it needs a 30 hp not 20 hp, as it has always laboured over the five years I've been using it. The duckweed makes it much worse, meaning we didn't have the time to do everything we wanted to. We missed the platform being fitted as we had very little space.

We were moving floating logs onto the side before Foxy could pass.

There is more fallen tree work that needs doing; this is only accessible using Foxy, but will have to wait until Foxy's engine has been repaired.

On a previous litter pick, we pulled the motorbike in the picture out and because Mark didn't have the Council's normal flat bed to haul the litter off onto, we had to leave it on Foxy. Overall our day was successful because we cleared all the floating rubbish off the duckweed, which is unsightly to see.

Underneath is a different matter: who knows what trolleys and bikes are under there? But that will be for the October litter pick when the duckweed has subsided.

Tim Rane

Love Your River Events

Sunday 18th October

Part of the York Environmental Festival



Find us on X (Formerly Twitter) at @riverfossyork



And we're on Facebook, too!

This includes 'Confluence',

3:00 to 4:00 pm on the banks of the Ouse next to Tower Gardens. This is a celebration and appreciation of local waterways.

Drop in or Dress up in celebration of rivers and bring a small sample of your local river (if you can, but not more than 100ml) for a ceremonial blending of the waters.

The gathering will make a short procession to the centre of York. Attracting public (and press) attention and thereby raising awareness of the state of Yorkshire rivers.

Later in the evening, 6:00 – 8:30 pm: a Bardic Session at SPARK.

An evening of words, music and poetry, led by writer Amy-Jane Beer (2023 Wainwright Prize winner: The Flow) and poet, playwright and performer, Dan Grimston.

Booking for Bardic event

Online: yorkenvironmentfestival.org.uk

During the afternoon there will be a special meeting of experts and advocates to develop a Charter for all Yorkshire Rivers.

Co-hosted by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust,
Ouse It or Lose It, Right to Roam

On the Foss

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