

# LOVE OF NATURE

*December 2021 – January 2022*

## **7th September – Potteric Carr, Doncaster**

We were back on home turf in September, for a guided walk around our local reserve Potteric Carr by Andy Dalton, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's 'Gateway Manager'. Andy led us around trails that were familiar to most of us but, however much you know a place, there's always something new to learn.

Like so much of the area, Potteric Carr has a dirty industrial past that, over time, cleaned up its act to become a haven for wildlife. The 1950s coal seams from Rossington Colliery penetrated under the area until progressive subsidence forced mining to cease, and fen conditions were allowed to return.

The area is still criss-crossed by railway lines originally used to transport coal and other heavy goods. Some tracks remain in use, and the unprepared can be startled for a few seconds by the incongruous sight and sound of a freight train passing through the reserve. Other rails are long gone, leaving behind footpaths along the tops of embankments that wind through the woods.

Since being declared a nature reserve in 1968, the original 13 hectares (just over 32 acres) has grown to more than 235 hectares, with 8km of paths, 5km of which are wheelchair friendly. Facilities for visitors have developed into a wonderful, accessible place to spend quality time – and the wildlife quite likes it there, too.

The landscape we see today is largely due to active management over the years by the Trust's staff and its dedicated volunteers, a number of whom we met along the way hard at work thinning undergrowth next to the trail.

At the end of our walk with Andy, we adjourned to the reserve café for refreshments, and to discuss where we would like to go next. It turns out we have many wonderful places to explore, some familiar and some new to the group. One significant area of agreement was that Potteric Carr's chips are the best in the area! Apart from that, the following decisions were made, setting us up for the next few months.

5th October – A walk from the Humber Bridge viewing area to Far Ings nature reserve with lunch at the Old Tile Works coffee shop/restaurant on the return leg (see the next report for how that went).

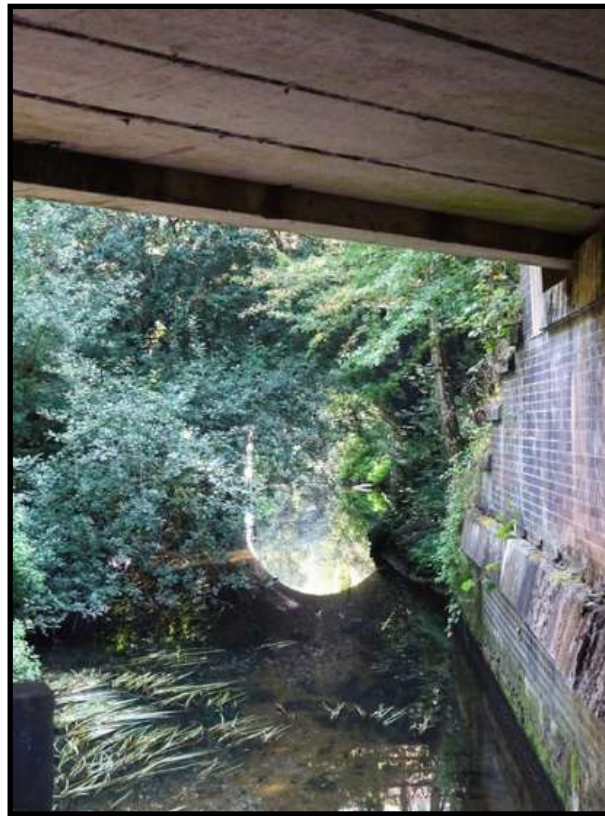
2nd November – A visit to Sherwood Forest with its ancient trees, autumn leaves and fungi.

7th December - A trip to the Donna Nook grey seal colony on the Lincolnshire coast, for the annual spectacle of thousands of seal cows giving birth and nurturing their pups for the first, vital few weeks of their lives. Last year, 2,214 pup births were recorded!

4th January – We plan to enjoy a post-Christmas meal, following some appropriately seasonal activity. I can't give you any more detail than that, as we haven't worked them out yet!



Potteric Carr with Andy Dalton



Rail bridge over Mother Drain



Railway bridges with Andy Dalton

## 5th October - The Humber Bridge viewing area to Far Ings nature reserve and back

The forecast in the week leading up to our walk was grim, and hadn't improved by the day we were due to meet up. There was a very real chance that we would be heavily rained upon and, being on the exposed banks of the Humber, we may also be blown onto the mudflats by gusting winds. However, without exception, the vote was to come out, dress sensibly, and take whatever weather was thrown at us. You just can't keep some people down.

We were delighted, therefore, that it was actually dry and mild when we arrived, so we set off with happy optimism. Heading west along the raised embankment under the thundering Humber Bridge, we soon found ourselves on the wide, tranquil and pleasant Viking Way.

First on our left was the Old Tile Works, established in 1840, and still producing fired clay roof tiles and other terracotta stock. Recent diversifications on the site include a super coffee shop/restaurant, but more on that later.



Viking Way from under the Humber Bridge



Far Ings - a view from a hide

The route then took us past the grounds of the old Humber Bridge Hotel, which closed earlier this year as a result of financial difficulties and land disputes. An application submitted prior to closure for 'Planning permission to erect 19 lodges, new access road and associated hardstanding' was withdrawn after generating a massive 824 almost entirely negative public comments. This made it one of the most-objected to planning applications in North Lincolnshire's history.

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust led the campaign against the hotel owners' plans, citing the harmful disturbance that would be caused to 'an incredibly special place'. Far Ings is home to a number of rare and threatened species that are found in very few places across the UK. As such, it has been recognised as one of Europe's most important sites for biodiversity and designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). So, developers 0, nature 1.

Past the hotel site, we took a gate into the nature reserve itself. Well-maintained paths led through woods and across fields, with viewing hides and screens well placed to offer views over the various water-filled pits and scrapes. Across the site, we encountered the usual wood pigeon, blackbird, dunnock, robin and various wee birds of the tit and finch families. We also heard the ridiculously loud voices of wrens and Cetti's warblers but, as is often the way with these secretive little characters, we didn't clap eyes on either of them.

From the various hides, sightings included: cormorant, grey heron, little egret, great crested grebe, little grebe, coot, moorhen, mallard, gadwall, tufted duck, teal, shoveler, black-headed gull, greylag goose and mute swan. No sign of the snipe, though, that I'd seen on a previous visit.

Tummies were rumbling by this point, so we left the reserve and looped back along the Viking Way. Some almost broke into a sprint to reach our lunch venue, but others dallied long enough to check out the hedgerows. These were rich with different-coloured berries, some of which we recognised and others we had to look up. God bless Google, eh?



After some time gazing at and poking a large, brown mushroom we couldn't identify, we caught up with our hungry friends, who had arrived back at the Old Tile Works restaurant and were already enjoying a rather good lunch. Afterwards, there was time to explore the rest of the site, which included a number of artisan craft units, plants for sale, and a garden shop. We were also very taken by some ingenious landscaping, where terracotta roof tiles had been used to construct extensive stretches of walls around the site (see image).

And the weather? For our entire walk, it stayed dry and with barely a breath of wind. It wasn't until we were all in the restaurant that we noticed it was raining outside, and by then we didn't care, because we'd had a really lovely morning and the food was great. We were just thankful for our uncannily good timing, and so pleased we hadn't chickened out and stayed at home.

*Lesley Bassett*



Walls made from terracotta roof tiles!

## July Walk - Idle Valley Nature Reserve, Retford



Froglet

Just over half an hour's drive from Doncaster, Idle Valley Nature Reserve is one of the largest sites for nature conservation in the East Midlands. It's a place of two halves, and both are worth visiting.

To the north, the landscape is largely grassland and wetland scrapes, and is home to many species of birds, and a stopping off point for migrants. There are a number of hides and viewing screens from which to see them, but no other facilities.

But our destination was the southern end of the reserve, which has the benefit of a café, shop, toilets and picnic area. It's also the start of four waymarked walks, and we decided to follow two of them, firstly through the woodlands and then around Belmoor Lake.

The forecast for the morning was for heavy rain, but were our spirits dampened? Not a bit of it. After all, the saying goes that there's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing. So, we put on brave faces and waterproofs, and headed off to find some nature.

Our path took us between a rich variety of trees and shrubs, and the hedgerows were full of flowers such as the wild rose, honeysuckle, bird's-foot trefoil and marsh orchids.

The woods were alive with birdsong, and we identified several warblers including the chiffchaff, blackcap, whitethroat and the startlingly loud Cetti's warbler. Sedge warblers were in full, scratchy song along the banks of the River Idle and, of course, there were the usual suspects, robins, blackbirds, tits, finches and wrens.

We weren't so lucky with the native fauna, though. We came across the sorry sight of a dead grass snake in the car park, but it did give us the rare chance to study its intricate skin pattern. On the footpath, I nearly consigned a tiny, well-camouflaged froglet to the same fate, but managed a nifty side-step in time. On the far side of the lake, where the reserve farm operates, there were some seriously intimidating long-horn cattle, and a small flock of rare sheep that were considerably less alarming.

And the weather? Defying predictions, it was completely dry and mild for the two hours we were walking. Our timing turned out to be spot-on, because just as we were getting into our cars to head home, the heavens opened, and the threatened deluge came to pass. We felt justifiably smug, as we'd had a very pleasant walk and our sou'westers weren't needed after all.



Little egrets



Warbler snacking



Small white butterfly



## August Walk – RSPB Old Moor, Bolton upon Dearne

We gathered on a pleasant summer morning in the courtyard of this fine reserve in the Dearne Valley, before setting off on our exploration. It's hard to believe that this was once a derelict post-industrial area, and that it was the removal of soil to cover an adjacent polluted site that enabled the creation of these thriving wetlands, and the development of a significant wildlife habitat.

I'd read the report of a previous Love of Nature group visit to Old Moor, during which they had identified 27 species of birds. So, could we do better? We were certainly going to try! Before we'd even left the visitor centre's sensory garden, we had our first sightings, a humble wood pigeon and a house sparrow. Well, they all count!

At the Reedbed Hide, the first stop on our circuit, we noted a grey heron, gadwall, tufted ducks, mallards, a mute swan, little grebe and cormorant. This hide is in bittern territory, but we weren't lucky enough to see or hear one this time.

We paused at a small pond to watch numerous dragonflies and damselflies criss-crossing the lily pads, hunting for insects. They ranged in size from slender damselflies to huge hawk dragonflies, which look like miniature helicopters hovering and darting above the water. What beautiful, jewel-like creatures!

A brief visit to the Bittern Hide added a further 3 species, but the panoramic view from the newest hide 'The Lookout', proved much better value, and we spent some time here watching the hundreds of birds on the various islands and in the water. From this hide, we added a further 9 species to our list, and David Bryan took some stunning photos of little egrets!

Those of us who were staying a bit longer took a break for lunch, agreeing to continue our quest to record 28 or more different bird sightings after we'd eaten.

The Tree Sparrow Hide was our final viewpoint for the day. Here, it was mostly garden birds visiting strategically placed bird feeders, with a few assorted others picking up the scraps from the ground. Here, we noted 9 more species, making a grand total of 30. We had completed our challenge!

To celebrate, we treated ourselves to ice creams back in the courtyard, before packing up our binoculars and field guides and heading home. We all agreed that it had been a thoroughly enjoyable day. Here's the full list of our sightings:

Wood pigeon	House sparrow
Grey heron	Gadwall
Tufted ducks	Mallard
Mute swan	Cormorant
Little grebe	Great crested grebe
Moorhen	Coot
Lapwing	Black headed gull
Lesser black backed gull	Herring gull
Canada goose	Greylag goose
Little egret	Blackbird
Robin	Blue tit

Great tit  
Greenfinch  
Chaffinch

Dunnock  
Goldfinch  
Pheasant

*Lesley Bassett*

*Photos by David Bryan*

### *August – September 2021 Newsletter*

The world is changing around us, and it's all change in the Love of Nature group too. Vanessa Whaley, who led the group on many countryside expeditions over recent years, is now heading off with her husband on some expeditions of their own. We wish them well on their travels.

With Vanessa off gallivanting, someone had to step into her walking boots. This is such a nice group, and members are looking forward to doing nice things again. However, no one person felt able to commit to sole leadership, so we've decided to team up and spread the load. I agreed to have my name added as Group Leader, along with experienced members Julia (Jools) Hunt and Tony Hodge.

Goodness knows I'll need all the help I can get. While I'm not new to the U3A movement, I am new to this area, and I'm not yet familiar with all the nature reserves and outdoor spaces within reach of Doncaster. However, I'm quickly discovering that there are plenty of them, and they are wonderfully diverse. I'm really looking forward to exploring them in the company of Love of Nature group members in the months ahead.

While still under Vanessa's maternal wing, and soon after COVID-19 restrictions eased in April, the group resumed its 1st Tuesday of the month meetings. In May we met up at a soggy Hatfield Moor, and in June we gathered on our drier home turf at Potteric Carr. By the time this newsletter comes out, we should have held our July meeting at Idle Valley Nature Reserve, Retford. Future meetings are at the planning stage, and all will be revealed as soon as we have a clue what we're doing next.

Now we're able to get out and about again as a group (assuming that Boris doesn't scupper our plans entirely!), Love of Nature Zoom meetings have been discontinued. Online meetings kept many groups like ours going through the difficult months, but now's our chance to do the real thing again, and it will take more than COVID-19 to keep us indoors!

*Lesley Bassett*

### *April – May 2021 Newsletter*

## **March 2021**

The first March Zoom meeting was presented by Nora Boyle. She put together an excellent, informative PowerPoint presentation on insects. The **different groupings of insects** were explained and examples were given. Nora's own outstanding photographs were used to illustrate the talk.

We were interested to learn that, in this country, there are 94 species of crane fly (daddy long-legs), 2,500 species of moths and 59 species of butterflies. We were informed that butterflies have taste sensors on their feet to help them find plants on which their caterpillars would feed.

*Bridget Thompson*





14 spotted ladybird



Gall wasp—*Andricus Quercuscalicis*



Plume moth



Batman hoverfly



Female banded demoiselle

## INSECT GROUPS (ORDERS) included in presentation

Coleoptera:	Beetles
Diptera:	True flies
Lepidoptera:	Moths and Butterflies
Hymenoptera:	Bees, wasps, ants and sawflies
Hemiptera:	True bugs
Odonta:	Dragonflies and Damselflies

*December 2020 – January 2021 Newsletter*

### October 2020

October, and more curfews, but a few of the Love of Nature group ventured out into the autumn colours of Potteric Carr.

Risk assessments done and armed with sanitiser, mask and waivers we set off into the drizzle.

The plan had been to have an Autumn Walk with one of the educators but sadly due to changing pressures of covid we were on our own.

I do not profess to be any kind of expert in nature terms, most of the group are more knowledgeable than I am therefore I suggested we just enjoy the reserve and observe the autumnal changes, so undaunted and socially distanced we set off.

We settled into an easy socially distanced pace, reminding each other if we stepped up too far. Potteric has some narrow pathways so you do have to be careful but we chattered and observed and chattered some more.

There was a decided lack of birds due to the weather but an abundance of fungi. Luckily one of us had a reference book, but we just enjoyed being out and about in company.

We aim to share some of the photos next week with any other members of the group that care to join on Zoom, then discuss what we could be doing together now the days are shorter, darker and colder.

We proved we could be covid secure therefore we are hoping a few at a time might brave the weather and share on Zoom regularly to maintain some semblance of normality through the wintery months. We will let you know how we progress. Please feel free to join us at anytime.

*Vanessa Whaley*







March heralded our first meet with Kat at Potteric Carr for our Love of Nature meeting. The title of our event was **Reptiles and Amphibians**.

The hope was that the weather would have been conducive to copious couplings of frogs, toads and newts. Perhaps even a snake or two! Alas, no such luck. A few days prior to our visit the weather had indeed warmed and dried but on that particular morning it felt more like winter again instead of a spring morning.

Not to be daunted though we did head off to Carr Field on the far side of the reserve. Kat helped us discover the habitat of the grass snake, a non-venomous snake that resides readily there. (Potteric Carr is not known for adders). Carr field is as you would expect. It's a field mostly surrounded by trees. It's an area that has recently been managed as a scrub area specifically for habitats for insects, amphibians and reptiles and now it has returned to its natural growth.



Reptiles like the area on the outside of a wooded area. The scrub grass allows them to wake up slowly in the warmth of the sun and then quickly disappear into the trees and thicker undergrowth to hide away. If you approach carefully you can often see grass snakes warming themselves on the fallen trees around the scrub. We not only didn't see the snakes but we didn't see the froglets that should have been venturing out.

Nature is a very temperamental lady and she wasn't sharing anything that morning. 'We' (Kat) went pond-dipping looking for nymphs, either May or Dragonfly. No luck. No frogspawn or toad spawn but that's not unusual. Potteric has many amphibians jumping and walking around but rarely do you spy frogspawn or toadspawn.

Not to be beaten, Kat took us off to the Discovery Area where we all hunted under logs and boulders for ....anything really, but Kat eventually found a female smooth newt. Obviously female, due to the lack of a bulbous appendage (because it's mating season). We all oohed and ahed at this tiny frame. The only sighting of either amphibian or reptile!

The morning certainly wasn't wasted though. Kat wouldn't let that happen. Along the walk, in the various areas we visited around the reserve, we discussed signs of spring, checked any animal tracks and noted numerous fungi. Spring is a wonderful, fresh start to the natural world awakening and even though the wet weather had seemed relentless some times earlier in the year, always around the corner is a brand new day. No time is wasted at Potteric Carr. Just because you can't see what you want to see you won't to be disappointed at what you do see.





## 3rd December 2019

Some 27 members of the group met with two captivating owls at an "**Owl Event**" in the Education Centre of Potteric Carr wildlife reserve. We were first introduced to Annette McKenzie, the keeper of the owls. Annette described how, as a teenager, she first became involved with birds of prey.

Annette introduced us to a very handsome female Barn Owl called Brillo. Annette purchased Brillo when the bird was at a young age. Like all captive birds of prey, Brillo was born and bred in captivity. Brillo came from a wildlife park near Spalding, Lincolnshire.

As Brillo perched patiently on her keeper's forearm, frequently and quickly turning her head, we members were intrigued by Annette's account of an owl's remarkable hearing, and wonderful ability to fly silently by night. Annette related various reasons for the marked decline in wild barn owl numbers since the 1930s. Happily, in more recent times, there has been an increase in the barn owl population, from a low of 4,500 breeding pairs, to 5,500 or 6,000 breeding pairs currently. Many barn owls now nest in nest boxes.

At her home, Annette keeps her birds of prey in an aviary. Brillo is periodically allowed to fly freely around her one acre garden. Annette takes her owls to care homes, cubs and brownies meetings, schools, outdoor community events, and even birthday parties!

Annette pointed out that all keepers of birds of prey must have licences, and are not allowed to release the birds into the wild. She explained the reasons for these regulations, while also telling us that birds in captivity live longer than their wild counterparts. Captive owls may live for 13 years, while those in the wild have an age span of just 3 years.

Annette next presented a very cute male Little Owl called Eric. Eric had speckled plumage, (which in the wild would provide excellent camouflage), and short wings. Little owls have a call which sounds like a yapping dog, and Eric duly gave us an audible demonstration. These birds weigh just 8 ounces, have various nesting sites, from holes in trees to rabbit warrens, and will eat woodlice and earthworms as well as larger prey.

At the close of a very interesting and fascinating owl presentation, many members were so endeared to Eric, that they gathered close up and personal, to take photographs, and simply to admire this attractive bird.

*Alan Brocklehurst*





In **November** a group of hardy U3A members spent a few hours doing hard labour at Potteric Carr Nature Reserve. They worked alongside the ranger and a group of volunteers doing the vital task of cutting down unwanted tree saplings that would, in time, have changed their habitat from a wetland area to a wooded area. We were told that animals sometimes slept on the warm ashes of the bonfires.

*B Thompson*



*December 2019 – January 2020 Newsletter*

## Spurn point

Early October and the Love of Nature group headed off to Spurn Point for its second safari along the long stretch of sand which extends three and a half miles into the Humber Estuary.

Its only vehicular access is by UNIMOG. A great big lumbering forces type lorry with extra large wheels that drive in any direction over any terrain. Just what's needed now for this 'tidal island' with its unpredictable tidal areas that can soon isolate the reserve from the mainland. The unimog is

much improved since our last visit now taking only sixteen passengers with its recently improved seating (very much like coach seats) as opposed to the bench seats we sat uncomfortably in previously. Seat belts as well as clear plastic windows/sides to protect against the weather (well sort of). Certainly it was warmer, more comfortable but sadly, not any quieter.

Spurn is managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and has become a renowned national and international important wildlife haven, developing into one of the top destinations for bird migration. It also has a rich maritime and military history plus a fascinatingly modernised lighthouse/museum. There is an unused Life Boat 'village' area, ample evidence of war time activities. Even if you are not a nature lover it's certainly an interesting place to visit, especially on a unimog.

There is a beautiful coastline for bird lovers as well as various habitats such as reed, bush, scrub and wetland. As a bird lover it is probably best to explore on foot. Travelling by unimog is exciting but very unsettling for the birds.

Andy our guide tried very hard to set us down in bird rich areas but although he could see them from the vehicle by the time we had stopped and disembarked they were long hidden.



There was one highlight during the journey, the tent-like shape of lacy looking spider-like webs in the scrub which neither of us had encountered before, which were in fact the over wintering silk tents of the Brown Tailed moth caterpillar. Quite fascinating and ruthless as once hatched the caterpillar devastates the area by devouring all the foliage. Fortunately the moth cleverly doesn't winter in the same area the following year allowing the area to quickly recover.

We travelled down to the point and were then guided around the end of the point, around the life boat village and many relics of war time looking for sightings. Andy had a flash sighting of a sea diver but we didn't witness that. We could hear some chattering in the bushes of the Scandinavian thrush identified by Andy but they were very illusive.

It was a beautiful sunshiny day even though there was a howling wind and we did hope we may see something exciting on the beach, but sadly it wasn't to be.

The only things we really saw were the freight ships that travel along the estuary constantly to maintain our supplies.



Spurn Point is a very interesting place to visit especially with a ranger but we only managed to have any real sightings once inside the hide on the return to the visitor centre where we saw Brent Geese, snipe, red shank, little egret, oyster catchers....

Maybe on our next visit we will need to bite the bullet and walk along the coastline.

*Vanessa Whaley*

### **Foraging at Potteric Carr- September 3rd 2019**

Before we started foraging, Kat explained that we had permission to forage on the site for educational purposes only. She had brought three containers in which we were to collect ingredients for a hawthorn syrup and three different teas. The intention was to forage on the route to the Education Centre (see below left) where Kat had set up the equipment needed to make the teas, the hawthorn syrup and some cooked pasta to eat with the syrup. (see below right) Accompanying us were a photographer and reporter from the Free Press who came with the intention of writing an article about U3A groups.



The teas we made were blackberry and beech leaf, water mint and elderberry and yarrow leaf. You may be familiar with the yarrow plant. (see flower below with the feathery leaf).





The ingredients were simply infused in boiling water for a few minutes before drinking.

I found the combination of Hawthorn Syrup and pasta worked very well and the addition of some grated cheese made it even more tasty. Judging by the number of people going back for a second taste I wasn't the only one who enjoyed the experience! Thanks to Kat for making the syrup and cooking the pasta and ..... for making the tea.

*Nora Boyle*

# **DONCASTER FREE PRESS: Thursday 10th October 2019**



A big thanks to Jane Page, our publicity officer, for arranging the interviews and the photographer. A wonderful advertisement for Doncaster U3A.





**July** saw the members of the group at Potteric Carr looking for **bees**. In **August** they were out again looking for **damselflies and dragonflies**. Many other creatures were also seen.



Photographs by Anne Windle, Norah Boyle and B Thompson



## Did we really see penguins???

“Oh, I can see the penguins” my very excited friend exclaimed as we were walking along **Bempton Cliffs**.

‘Penguins’ Hmmm. Sometimes the heat of the moment takes over and you get a rush of blood to the brain and all the names get mixed up. It happens to the best of us.

What my very animated friend meant to say was PUFFIN.

A member of the auk genre, comically squat on land but supreme diving bird that survives on sand eels and can hold up to 80+ in their orange beak, I’m reliably informed.

It was the Love of Nature group visit to Bempton cliffs in early May, observing the spring nesting sea birds at the RSPB sanctuary there.

The draw is, of course, the puffins. Last year we visited but had a poor show. Evidently sand eels, their main food source, are becoming more scarce just off our coastline, but this year the numbers of puffins certainly felt increased. We all had several sightings, one being a young chick popping out of its little burrow, turning its back to the sea and evacuating his/her bowels.

But Puffins aren’t the only birds putting on a grand show. There is always a majestic display from the imposing gannet. So sleek and missile looking as it enters the sea to fish. Their courting is something to be wondered at too. Bobbing up and down lovingly, in symmetry. Collecting large beaks full of grass to add to the nest.

Other birds, jostling for a prime position on the cliffs, regardless of how precarious it is, are the razorbills, guillemots and gulls. Trying to prevent predation can be a perilous job and even if the rats can’t reach the nests the crows manage to.

Sadly we saw plenty of evidence of this. Lots of brightly coloured egg shells along the edges of the cliff. Each marking distinctive to each individual, just as our fingerprints. Nature in the raw.

*Vanessa Whaley*





Photographs: Nora Boyle & Mike Bowser



One morning in flaming **June**, when the leaden skies threatened rain, members of the Love of Nature group met at Potteric Carr. Our mission was to spot and identify the **wildflowers** and other flora alongside the paths of the Nature Reserve. Our leader was Kat, a ranger at Potteric Carr.

Very soon, we were peering into the verges, and identifying grasses and plantains. Further along, we spotted the tiny flowers of a Crane's-bill. Our next discovery was the Silverweed, a Potentilla, having a silvery sheen to the underside of each leaf. Proceeding along tree-bordered paths, members were able to identify several yellow, white, purple or pink flowers. We saw Common Knapweed with red-purple thistle-like flowers, and the pea-like flowers of the Common Bird's-foot Trefoil.

Moving to more open meadow land, excitement rose as we identified the Common Spotted Orchid.

In a shady wooded area, we found the Crosswort, a plant with tiny yellow flowers, and pale green leaves arranged in fours around their stems. Nearby, we spotted Wild Strawberries: some in flower, some with tiny red fruits. Some of us found flower names as fascinating as their colours. Thus we saw Meadowsweet, Herb-Robert, Herb-Bennet, Hedge Woundwort, and Goat's Beard.

We came across flowers with more sinister names: Black Medick, Hemlock, and Woody Nightshade.

At the end of our flora fieldwork, we drove home with the colours and the names of the wildflowers in our thoughts (and perhaps insect bites on our hands or ankles!). It had been an eye-opening morning of discovery.

*Alan Brocklehurst*



Woody nightshade



Hemlock



Black Medick

## Bushcraft – March 2019

"Ging Gang goolie goolie Ging Gang etc.. Sorry, got carried away there. It was back to our scouting days at our March meeting of the Love of Nature group. With toggles at the ready, we were cooking over open fires, tying knots and generally living the outdoor life. Kat, our own resident ranger, showed us how to light a fire using flint and dried moss and twigs quickly building up to a few roaring log fires.

In the absence of any squirrel it was sausage and baked potatoes for lunch which always tastes great outdoors and what else to finish off but marshmallows toasted on the ends of twigs

We ended with the honing of our knot skills. Who knows when you'll need those these days. Then homeward bound with twigs in our hair and smelling of smoke!

At our April meeting we were taken by Andy, our YWT wildlife expert, round the woods for some bird spotting. Less adventurous but still enjoyable. Abseiling down the cliffs at Bempton in May! See you at the AGM ...hopefully."

*Mike Bowser*





## Bird Recognition: April 2019



*Chiffchaff*



*Marsh Harrier*

The U3A Nature Watch group met in April at Potteric Carr Reserve for bird watching. We were led by Andy from the Reserve.

It was a cloudy, cool and damp morning for our walk. Our purpose was to listen to, watch and observe the bird life.

As soon as we left the Centre we saw Marsh Harriers flying over the lake. Walking on through the reserve we admired the blackthorn blossom and wild primula. Our guide identified numerous bird songs as we walked along and we listened to chiffchaff, great tits, chaffinch, song thrush, blackcap, wren, and Cetti's warbler and we glimpsed some of the varieties high in the trees. We soon reached an area on the reserve of felled trees. Our guide explained that leaving the trees was a way of creating and encouraging a natural habitat for rarer breeds such as the increasingly rare willow tit. We were also fortunate to see wild deer in adjoining fields as we walked to one of the hides.

We stopped at the Piper Marsh hide identifying on the banks and water various types of ducks – pochard, shoveller, gadwall and teal. We also observed greylag and Canada geese, coots and snipe.

Returning to the Centre, we had all enjoyed a very informative guided bird tour – all being much wiser about our many varied feathered friends!!

*Sue Coote*



*Pochard*



*Teal*



*Shoveller*

## Denaby Ings - 5th February 2019

On a very frosty morning 16 members met at the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve in the Dearne Valley with binoculars at the ready to locate and identify birds. We had been alerted to a recent sighting of a great grey shrike but realistically weren't expecting that it would still be around.

When everyone had arrived we set off into the reserve and almost straight away came to a feeding station where we saw several blue tits, great tits and robins feeding on fat balls. The lake to the left of the footpath was frozen solid with, initially, not one bird in sight. To the right of the footpath through the tree line we could see the river where the water was flowing freely allowing several tufted ducks to swim upstream.

As we continued walking round the reserve we could see several birds on the surface of the water including shelduck, mallard, coot and black-headed gull. Behind them were several trees and perched on their branches were seven or eight cormorants and two heron. We lingered awhile discussing the finer aspects of cormorant ID then continued following the path round the lake back to the car park.

On the way we came across several hazel bushes bearing their catkin. Anne Windell took this photo of them.

We then adjourned to a nearby pub 'The Pastures', where we enjoyed a well earned lunch. (The carvery looked particularly good?)

Nora Boyle





## Don't give Hedgehogs Milk!

In **October** the Love of Nature group organised an evening safari at Potteric Carr. Andy, the manager of the reserve, willingly headed up the group ready with all the answers to our questions.

Obviously, we were expecting to catch a glimpse of nocturnal behaviour. The reserve has a few very healthy badger setts, numerous deer, foxes, bats and owls but, sadly, nature was against us.

The weather had been particularly stormy and the wind continued to be a nuisance so all we managed to glimpse was a lonely seabird coming home and a distant flap of owls wings.

However, time is never wasted. Potteric Carr in darkness is something few people get to experience and Andy regaled us with recent developments and interesting research that's ongoing and perhaps, just perhaps, all our chatter kept nature safely undercover until we had departed.

For our **November** meeting we decided to invite someone along that could answer some of our questions on the apparent decline of one of our favourite small mammals, the hedgehog. (No hedgehogs at Potteric Carr because badgers are a fierce predator of them).



Alan and Anita Broadhead run a volunteer hedgehog rescue centre in Barnsley and are deeply passionate about these lovable creatures and willingly part with anything up to two thousand pounds of their pension every year to care for poorly hedgehogs that are brought or sent to them from all over England.

They provide clean, safe, warm habitats for their recovery, plus all food and medicine. Their knowledge and experience is well known in the area and the vets trust their diagnosis and help with the provision of medicines.

The couple believe there are numerous reasons for the decline in numbers, such as walled gardens, less hedgerows, chemical slug pellets, loss of habitat, more cars, but they also feel there is a raised awareness that is slightly improving the chances for the hogs.

Alan and Anita had lots of tips, tales and information, all of which you can find published by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. This society is a charity which often requests Alan and Anita to take in needy hedgehogs but never give any funds.

The tip I thought most astonishing was the fact that we should never offer hedgehogs milk. From being very young I thought we should put milk out. Even when my children were growing up and we had many hedgehogs in our garden we put out milk. Maybe that's why I haven't any hedgehogs anymore despite cutting hedgehog holes in my fences.

Evidently, milk makes the hedgehogs very constipated and the resulting management of the problem is not very pleasant. A big thank-you to Alan and Anita.

**December** saw us preparing for Christmas, making our very own natural decorations. From personalised messages on wooden medallions to felt wreaths and sparkly trees. We did try extremely hard to keep within our conservation message but you cant have Christmas without a little bit of glitter or a red pompom for Rudolph's nose.

For those of us that aren't very 'crafty' it's a great way to 'have a go'. It's really surprising how therapeutic creating a messaged bauble to your grandchildren can be.

There were some laughs, 'serious spillages' and lots of festive fun followed by turkey and trimmings in a bread bun. What more could you ask for.

*Vanessa Whaley*





The September meeting of the 'For the Love of Nature' group took us to Potteric Carr Nature Reserve. Sarah, who was standing in for Kat, was our guide for the session. She was supported by Jamie, a new ranger trainee. Our objective was **tree recognition**. Armed with tree guides, we walked on a course that passed as many different species of trees as possible.

We talked about simple leaves and compound leaves and about leaves that grew in opposite pairs or alternate pairs. We analysed individual leaves by looking at their shape, size, thickness, surface texture, and determined whether or not they were lobed or unlobed, with toothed or smooth edges and flat or round stalks. We were reminded that, for accurate recognition, we must look at the tree as a whole and not simply its leaf.

We heard about some of the history of Potteric Carr when it was agricultural land or fenland and we discussed the reasons for pollarding and coppicing trees.

With regards to ageing trees, we were told that trees in open spaces would grow more freely and that their rings would be further apart than trees growing in more dense woodland where the light would be more restricted.

We learnt how to identify conifers by looking at the number of needles that come out of the same spot on a twig. Pine trees have needles in groups of 2, 3 or 5. Larches have bursts of spines. Firs and spruces have feathery spines where the needles are always attached individually. Spruce needles are sharply pointed, square and easy to roll between your fingers. Fir needles are softer, flat and cannot be rolled between your fingers.

Other plants were also identified en-route.

*Bridget Thompson*



Acorns on a  
pedunculate oak



Oak gall



Wild snapdragon



Guelder Rose





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Visit to RSPB: **Old Moor**, Barnsley





## **DAWN CHORUS**

Our dawn chorus event was feared a wash-out following the unspring like weather recently but we were, thankfully, very pleasantly surprised. It was cold, ground frost cold, but bright and fresh and tingly when we set out at 5.30, yes 5.30 a.m. to witness what we glibly call the dawn chorus when actually it was well past dawn. With the promise of the kitchen opening early for us at Potteric Carr we strode forth around the reserve listening out for the early bird. Andy, our leader for the event, had already been out onto the reserve and was aware of which birds were up and about busy building nests and defending territories.

We were introduced to the chirrupings and chirpings of quite a few types of warblers (Cetti's, Sedge and Reed) around the reed beds. Andy's hearing being very acute was tuned, obviously, to the sounds of all birds difficult to spot and identify.

Very knowledgeable and passionate, as regards the life cycles of the birds and of conservation, Andy explained, as we were exploring, the reasons why the reserve is managed in certain ways for the different species already living on the reserve and the ones the rangers are trying to encourage.

Moving out of the reed beds into the grasslands we heard the 'flutey' (Andy's description, not mine) tune of the blackcap, sometimes mistaken for the blackbird, but Andy informed us we had missed the blackbirds – they were up first and had done their singing and were now feeding frenziedly.

*Vanessa Whaley*

## **Idle Valley Nature Reserve – February 2018**

On a frosty, murky February morning the Love of Nature group visited Idle Valley Nature Reserve, near Retford.

*Photos by Terry Gunnill, Eileen Johnston and Diane Woolven.*



*Diane Woolven*

Terry Gunnill





Eileen Johnston





Diane Woolven





Bridget Thompson