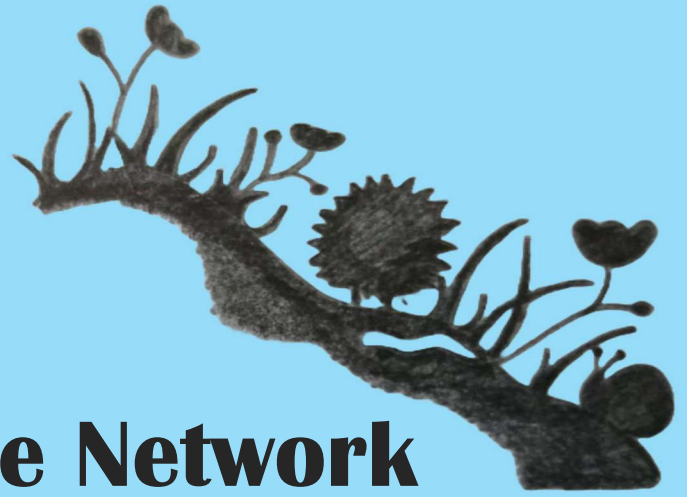


Issue 2, April



Holmedale Nature Network Newsletter



Spring is here and have you noticed a change?

Maybe you have heard the return of our curlews, lapwings and skylarks, or perhaps you have noticed that outdoors smells different or have felt the warmth of the spring sun on your skin or not. It has been a rather damp spring so far. However, in the last week I have been delighted to notice the buzz of bumblebees and have caught a flutter of a butterfly out the corner of my eye. Where are the swallows? Has anyone seen them return yet?

Our change...

We have a new name. Did you spot it? The Holmedale Nature Network is now well on the way to establishing ourselves as an organisation. We have a team of 5 willing trustees and are finalising the constitution before applying to be a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. We hope to be able to launch ourselves officially by September 2024 equipped with our own website, a fancy logo, our values and our vision for the future.

This year so far... It has been an exciting start to the year; our series of monthly talks and activities has proved popular with residents and will continue through May and June. A huge thank you to everyone that came along to support us. You have contributed a generous amount which has allowed us to really build some momentum and for that we are very grateful. We hope you have been inspired by our speakers as much as we have. We also received a £500 grant from Magic Little Grants which will go towards the costs of setting up our organisation, future venue hires and insurance.

Lizzie Rumble and the Holmedale Nature Network Team



Photo courtesy; Rob Clipsham, Whashton

In February,

Carl Watts, Reserve manager at Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve, provided a thought-provoking talk, *Away with the Birds*, which charted his journey through various conservation roles and provided commentary on the natural world and the challenges and sometimes rather quite tough decisions faced in conservation.

An important takeaway was that we should leave our beloved dogs at home when visiting a nature reserve and at the minimum keep dogs on a lead and under close control during ground nesting season. Even when kept on a lead, the presence of dogs has been found to significantly reduce bird populations. Another key message was to feed garden birds all year round and especially during and after nesting season; after all, raising chicks is hard work.

The following week, we held a *Bird Nest Box Building Workshop* run by Brian Rogers, a volunteer at Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve in Catterick. Despite some ongoing access issues with gate at the reserve the workshop was well attended and enjoyed by adults and children alike. With clear instructions, some handy tools and Bryan's keen eye for tiring arms (in our attempts to build them without the help of power tools), many robin and bluetit style nest boxes were successfully built. Providing nest boxes is one of the easiest ways to help birds which can struggle to find suitable nesting sites around developed areas due to the loss of natural holes.



In March,

Malcolm Hockham, formerly of Eggleston Hall Gardens and Plantsman's Corner, presented an evening talk on *Planting for Pollinators*, starting with a reminder that bees are not the only pollinators (think wasps, hoverflies, butterflies, birds, people, and the list goes on). The talk provided an interesting insight into native plants and the introduction of the wide range of species we now have in the UK. He also explored some common myths about plants and pollinators, along with showing us a list of edible plants that do not require pollination, such as root vegetables. Nevertheless, the decline of insects has been dramatic in recent decades, and everyone can take simple steps to help populations recover.

Malcolm also presented a well-attended workshop on *Seed and Plant Propagation* the following week and used a mixture of video, photos and practical demonstration to aid our understanding and retention. Colin Heppenstall of Kirby Hill commented: *"I found the whole talk / demonstration fascinating, and Malcolm's passion for what he does shone through. I learnt more in two hours there than I have looking at endless YouTube videos and tv programmes, and he gave me the*

confidence to just have a go and try things I wouldn't have before." Another attendee from Gayles, Jane Hughes, commented that *"Malcolm was inspiring, and I have been busy today putting it all into practice! He was such a fount of knowledge and experience; and great fun to listen to as well - we went home with lots of ideas and plans for our garden. It was also lovely to get together with other local gardening enthusiasts."* The real bonus was his provision of lots of take away plants – cuttings, seeds, willow and miscellaneous materials.

Malcolm's top 10 plants for supporting pollinators in your garden are: Eupatorium purpureum, Echinops (bannaticus or ritro), Sedum spectabile, Papaver rhoeas (Shirley poppies), Buddleja (all species), Teasel, Thyme, Lavender, Rosemary and Verbenas bonariensis.



Photo: Golden ringed Dragonfly just finishing its tasty snack of a bumblebee in a wildflower rich meadow near to a wetland area at Foxglove Covert Local Nature reserve last summer.





In April, Charlotte Simons of the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust gave a talk on *Healthy Rivers*. Charlotte shared her extensive knowledge of our rivers and what a healthy river looks like. Unfortunately, currently only 14% of UK rivers are in good ecological health. In response to the question “What are the top 3 things we can do as individuals to help our rivers?” Charlotte advised; 1. Get to know your local rivers. 2. Report any pollution incidents immediately to the Environment Agency. 3. Think about how you use water at home- use it sparingly and use rainwater on the garden instead of tap water and think about waste; check and maintain your drainage systems; avoid disposing of fats down the sink and consider what you wash your car with and where it goes.



Work on the local watercourses will be a focus of the Holmedale Nature Network this summer. Residents, trained in January on a Natural England citizen science project, have been surveying publically accessible sections of the Dalton/Holme/Skeeby watercourse which originates on moorland above Newsham and runs through Holmedale down to the Swale. We are evaluating physical characteristics, flow trends, signs of pollution and the presence of non-native invasive species, such as Himalayan Balsam. Monitoring of river flies has been ongoing since 2023.

Also in April, Lizzie Rumble launched the second year of the **Bilberry Bumblebee Project** with a Bumblebee Identification course run and funded by Catherine Mercer at the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust. *“We were lucky with the weather as the sun came out for us and we managed to practise our ID skills this year on a few living bumblebee*

queens.” A fun fact about bumblebees is that only the females have a sting. That is because they are more invested in defending their nest. The queens and workers (females) are the ones that are busy doing all the hard work, keeping the nest clean, nursing and foraging for food for the colony.

The project now has 11 trained beewalkers (bumblebee surveyors) for this year, six of which live in Holmedale. We now have five sites to survey six times between 1st May and 15th July. We had only a couple of sightings of the astoundingly bright Bilberry bumblebee last year but recorded all the other bees that we saw which came to 388 bees in total across four sites.



The Bilberry Bumblebee is one of the UK’s rarest bumblebees with its range progressively declining to the North and Scotland. Its habitat is substantially confined to the fringe of upland pasture and moorland, which is typically characteristic of Richmondshire’s classical Yorkshire Dales and gives us a great opportunity to support the preservation of this iconic species. Its Latin name *Bombus monticola* describes it as a mountaineer favouring higher altitude and a cooler climate. Our first step is to collect data as an indicator of our current populations which we hope to do over 5 years.

Our summer project...Himalayan Balsam...by Matthew Usher



One of the key threats to the biodiversity of Holmedale and its watercourses is the presence of Invasive Non-Native Species, including Himalayan balsam. This has large pink flowers and can grow to above head height. It was first introduced as a garden plant in the 1800s, but soon became widely naturalised particularly along watercourses, although it can also spread in verges and gardens. It is fast-growing and spreads quickly, smothering and out-competing other native vegetation as it goes. Himalayan Balsam dies back in the autumn leaving soil and riverside banks exposed and vulnerable to erosion. Its explosive seed pods aid its spread by sending the seeds into the watercourse, causing further spreading downstream. *(continued overleaf)*

Holmedale Nature Network will begin tackling the spread of Himalayan Balsam in Holmedale by running volunteer sessions throughout the summer to remove it. We are also offering training on identification and mapping invasive non-native plant species, including Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed. **Our first session is Thursday 6th June** in Dalton, followed by sessions in Newsham, Gayles, Ravensworth and Gilling. To get involved, contact us on 07984 756080 or wildwashton@gmail.com.

Upcoming talks and activities...

Meadow Creation, a talk by Catherine Mercer, Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust. **Monday 13th May**, 7:30pm, Ravensworth Village Hall. £2 donation.

Earby Hall farm visit, hosted by Ben and Harry Hoskyns-Abrahall. This is an opportunity to see the benefits of 30 years of biodiversity improvements on their working farm at Newsham. The visit will involve a walk of 2-3 miles and stout footwear is recommended. Children welcome but no dogs please. **Saturday 25th May**, 1-4 pm. £5 donation per family. Refreshments will be provided. **Booking is required.** Please email: wildwashton@gmail.com.

Creating a wildlife pond in your garden, a talk by Jim Pearson, JMP Pond Services, **Tuesday 11th June**, 7:30pm, Gilling West Village Hall. £2 donation.



Opportunities

WANTED

Volunteer – IT work

Support our website creation by shadowing Ross Addinall, who will be working on creating our new website over the summer.

Please contact Ross for more information:
ross@addinall.org.uk

Woodland volunteers wanted

For various tasks that will help the young trees to survive and flourish in Whashton.

Contact Paul: paulbernard99@gmail.com



Volunteers for Himalayan Balsam Pulling

2-hour sessions throughout Holmedale, June to August

Contact: 07984 756080 or wildwashton@gmail.com

SWIFT SURVEY

Do you know where they are in Holmedale?
Do you have a nest box or would you consider putting one up?

Hopefully like-minded supporters can combine our efforts to help these wonderful, migratory birds establish a strong foothold in our villages for years to come.

Please contact Charlotte: 07936 136076

WANTED

Volunteer – Events Planner

The Holmedale Nature Network would like a volunteer to take a leading role with our talks and activities.

Contact: wildwashton@gmail.com

Coast to Coast B-Lines project

Buglife has funding from Natural England to look into wildflower habitat creation opportunities at sites around the B-Lines network and the Coast-to-Coast network, which includes Holmedale.

Do you have a potential site for habitat creation or improvement work?

Please contact Rachel:
Rachel.richards@buglife.org.uk