

Yare Valley Society

Enhancing the Valley
for Wildlife and Informal Recreation

Newsletter 117 May 2023



Diary Date: Society AGM on evening of Wednesday 21st June, see end of Newsletter.

Promoting biodiversity is the theme of this Newsletter; beginning with:

St Andrew's Eaton Eco-Fair Saturday 13th May

The Parish of Eaton has the Yare Valley green corridor along its southwestern boundary, and contains three nature reserves and a potential wildflower meadow. It is on the frontline in the fightback to halt and eventually reverse biodiversity loss, and so the Parish Church of St Andrew's is an ideal location for an Eco-Fair focussed on promoting neighbourhood wildlife.

“The Eco Church Team at St Andrew's invite all to their Eco Day to be held in the church on Saturday 13th May between 10am and 2pm. Our focus this year will be on the biodiversity of our local neighbourhood.”



The Eco Fair will have stalls of eco-friendly products, and talks and walks exploring the local ecology. As can be expected the Yare Valley features strongly in Eco-Fair activities with a birdwatching walk on Marsden Marsh and a walk to the Strawberry Field to see the developing wildflower meadow. Of the several talks at the fair there will be a talk by Matt Tomlinson of the Friends of Strawberry Field and UEA Meadows (see also below). Matt was much appreciated as our speaker on this subject at our last AGM.

More details of the Eco-Fair are at:

<https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/event/st-andrews-eaton-eco-fair-2023/>

As last year, YVS will have a display stand highlighting the importance of the Yare Valley in supporting and restoring local biodiversity.

Panel from last year's YVS Stand

Norwich Biodiversity Strategy: Establishing a baseline to Measure Biodiversity

In March of this year a representative of the Yare Valley Society joined representatives from other environmental organisations in a workshop to give input to the Norwich Biodiversity Baseline Study. The study aims to create a comprehensive evidence base as a biodiversity baseline for Norwich. It is expected to be finalised in summer 2023.

The Norwich Biodiversity Baseline Study “is intended to:

- help deliver the aims of Norwich City Council’s Biodiversity Strategy,
- help inform the production of a biodiversity net gain guidance/supplementary planning document and
- link to other relevant strategies such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and 2030 species recovery targets set out in the Environment Act 2021.”

We are pleased to see that many of the points that were made by the Society have come through to the “Main Findings”. These include: the importance of green corridors, the need for integrating into the planning system connectivity with areas beyond Norwich City, and allocating money and resources to biodiversity and conservation. These points have a particular bearing on the Yare Valley, being a green corridor that runs through the district council areas of both Norwich and South Norfolk, with significant calls on funding to continue future conservation management.

More on Norwich City Council’s Biodiversity Strategy is at:

https://www.norwich.gov.uk/news/article/599/council_publishes_ambitious_proposals_to_boost_norwich_s_biodiversity



Biodiversity is being enhanced on the Strawberry Field

Photo Matt Tomlinson

Friends of Strawberry Field and UEA Meadows: volunteering sessions

Matt Tomlinson of the “Friends of Strawberry and UEA Meadows” has outlined for us the volunteering sessions for the coming year, which include establishing a wildflower biodiversity baseline:

- Quadrant sampling both on Strawberry field and UEA broad hay meadow, to establish a wildflower biodiversity baseline. Around Early June
- Collecting yellow Rattle seeds from Marston Marshes. Around mid-September
- Seeding Yellow rattle into UEA broad hay meadow. Around late September
- Planting wildflower plug plants on UEA broad hay meadow. Around late September/early October

It is yet to be decided whether there will be a need to remove Ragwort from the Strawberry Field this year. There are more details of the Friends’ work on the YVS website News page.

If you would like to join the volunteers in their work, please get in touch with them via <https://www.facebook.com/strawberryfieldandUEAmeadows> . Details and dates will then be sent to you as they become available.

NWT appoints Manager for its Urban Nature Reserves

The Purchase of Harford Bridge Meadows by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust was a welcome commitment to the future of the Yare Valley green corridor.

The Norfolk Wildlife Trust has now appointed Matt Wickens as the Manager for the Norfolk Wildlife Trust Urban Nature Reserves of Sweet Briar Marshes, Thorpe Marshes, and **Harford Bridge Meadows**.



Longhorn Cattle Graze on Harford Bridge Meadows

Photo John Elbro

The Society is interested in how the NWT sees Harford Bridge Meadows contributing to the biodiversity of the Valley in the future. Matt Wickens primary concern at the moment is overseeing the development of the NWT's new acquisition of Sweet Briar Marshes, where much needs to be done.

For the past two-and-a-half years prior to Matt's appointment, Adam Houlgate, the Reserve Manager for the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's "Broads South" reserves, has had Harford Bridge Meadows under his remit. He has kindly written to us about the present management of the Meadows:

"Harford Bridge Meadows is a small - approximately two hectares - plot, donated to the NWT in 2017. It is bisected by the river Yare and bordered to the East by the A140. There is no public right of access to the site and no provision for parking. Animals of conservation importance identified at the site include Water Vole, Reed Bunting, Yellow Hammer, Song Thrush, Snipe and Woodcock.

For management purposes, the land on either side of the river may be considered separately:

The Southern plot has been grazed in the past and, although lacking in biodiversity, indicators of a fen community are present such as Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Ragged Robin and Water Forget-me-not. The site is inundated from the river in the winter and waterlogged conditions are a feature. We fenced the area in 2018 and it is now grazed by an external grazer from April to October; this reduced season prevents hoof damage, when the ground is at its softest. In the winter of 2021/22 one of the ditches was excavated to prevent it from drying out completely and thus diversify the plant community.

The Northern plot was more under grazed and the vegetation ranker. Common Reed, Nettle and Great Willowherb dominate. In an effort to increase diversity, we have instigated a programme of cutting the vegetation by hand each August on a four-year rotation. By leaving areas to grow for four years, areas of tall, undisturbed vegetation remain as nesting habitat for birds and harvest mice."

Restoring the River for wildlife

The Environmental Agency is funding Norfolk Rivers Trust to work on schemes that will increase meanders in the river, increase the speed of flow of the water, and trap more of the sediment that it transports. At the same time the schemes will aim to improve water quality, and provide marginal cover and habitat for river dwellers, such as water voles.

Woody berms are being installed at various points along the banks of the River Yare between Cringleford Bridge and the UEA campus. The woody berms are made up of woody material, mainly alder, layered at the river margins and held tightly in place by stakes and cross braces. In places this has necessitated cutting back some of the vegetation on the banks to provide the materials.



Newly constructed woody berm

Photo John Elbro



Bank reinforcement on Marston Marsh

As time passes, reeds and other marginal vegetation will become established in the berms to give a more naturalised appearance and create habitat. An idea of what a mature berm might look like can be seen in a Wessex River Trust booklet.*

Committee members on a recent visit to the river with Sarah Gelpke of the Norfolk Rivers Trust, who is overseeing the project, were able to see the changes in the direction and speed of flow of the river that had already been achieved.

The Norwich Fringe Project has also been at work, using natural materials to restore sections of bank that have become eroded at Marsden Marsh. It has inserted faggots at places of serious bank erosion, these will help to consolidate the bank and reduce further erosion.

* The Wessex River Trust Booklet can be found at:

<https://www.wessexrt.org.uk/assets/files/ChalkstreamRestorationExamples--EmailVersion.pdf>

Will next McCarthy Stone application better promote biodiversity?

A big thank you to all who wrote to the Planning Department with your concerns about the two most recent McCarthy Stone Planning applications (Bartram Mowers, Bluebell Road). The two applications have now been withdrawn. Details of these applications are in our last Newsletter, and can also be found on the YVS website News page.

We remain hopeful that any replacement applications will give greater attention to improving biodiversity in the Valley.

2023 AGM

The 2023 YVS AGM is booked at Cringleford Sports Pavilion for Wednesday 21 June. Our speaker will be Sarah Gelpke of the Norfolk Rivers Trust who will give us the background on current works on the river to improve biodiversity (see above).

The AGM papers will be in our next Newsletter, but now is the time to think about becoming a committee member. If you are interested, please be in touch via the email given in the box below.

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Yare Valley Society

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