

# CROMWELL BOTTOM WILDLIFE GROUP

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## *Welcome to CBWG's Spring newsletter*

Spring is an exciting time of change. The sun is getting warmer and the days are getting noticeably longer. All around us nature can be seen bursting into life. Birds start to sing and trees begin to bud. Flowers start to come into bloom and insects such as bees and butterflies can be seen on the wing.

Spring therefore is a great time to visit the reserve at Cromwell Bottom. It is a time when the reserve begins to come alive with colour and sound. Whatever your age a walk around the reserve in spring is a great time to play at being a nature detective.

What can you hope to see and discover on your walk around the reserve? You could look out for frogs, toads and newts as they visit the ponds to spawn. Try watching out for the first bumble bees, probably overwintering queens that have survived the winter. What can be more delightful than the sight of those early emerging butterflies making the most of the short time they have in order to feed, mate and lay their eggs on host plants like Nettle and Birdsfoot Trefoil. How many can you spot and name? Spring is also a perfect time go for a walk through some of our local bluebell woods that are near the reserve. The sight and smell of a bluebell wood in dappled sunshine is for me one of the great joys of nature.

As you walk around the reserve you will hear and see both resident and summer migrant birds. For them spring is a busy time, the race is on to establish a territory, find a mate and raise a family. To make a success of that, many of our birds begin to sing for all they are worth! Try listening for the sound of the first Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and Song Thrushes. Listen out for the wonderful song of the male Blackcap and the humble Blackbird with its rich flute-like song. Take the opportunity to walk around the reserve and take note of which species of the Tit family is using our nest boxes.

Spring is the time when we say farewell to winter visitors and welcome back those summer migrant birds like Sand Martins, House Martins and Swifts. They return here to make the most of our long warm days so that they can feed and breed. Perhaps I'm sentimental, but I always take a few moments every spring when I first see them to welcome them back and wish them well for the time they spend with us.

Whether you are young or young at heart, an expert or a complete novice I hope you enjoy all the delights that spring has to offer on the reserve in 2017.

Allan Wolfenden (Chair CBWG)



# NEWSLETTER

**Cromwell  
Bottom  
Wildlife Group**

Working for Conservation and Development at  
Cromwell Bottom Local Nature Reserve

# President's Postulations.....

Winter is now over though you would not really know we have had one, apart from a few icy days. However, by the time you get this newsletter things could have changed dramatically! At the time of writing it has been like spring with trees in bud, Robins chasing each other and Reed Buntings in glorious plumage for breeding.

Looking at the 2016 Year List of birds (please see the poster in the Cabin), a few of the highlights were an Osprey flying over, a Ring Tailed Hen Harrier that flew in at the end of the ski lake, a Raven and a male Wheateater that stayed around for about 3 weeks, as well as a flock of Linnet on North Loop.

One of my favourite birds was a WW2 bird, **The Spitfire**, although I wasn't able to count this! It was a glorious sight to see banking over the reserve! Missing in 2016 were the Redpolls and although not confirmed, there was a sighting in January (one pictured below right). A lot of reserves have been down on them and I wonder, **is climate change affecting them?**

Work goes on for the reserve with the grant for the pond dipping platform (please see the article further on in the newsletter). We had a lot of fun fitting it and a huge thank-you goes to the volunteers who turned out on a not very bright and sunny day! The tag cut area is now almost complete hopefully the top ponds are next, along with the river path clearance. We have also put up several new nest boxes, on a very cold day indeed -

3 Blue tit/Great tit boxes, 3 for Robins and 1 for Woodpeckers.

*If you would like to come along and help please contact me.*

Yours, Graham.



## Spotlight On Volunteers: meet Dan Buckle, landscape gardener.

I first heard of CBWG in February 2015. I'd stopped for a short rest at the bird-feeders while on a walk through the reserve. It wasn't long before Allan (Wolfenden - Chair) had introduced himself - a few minutes later and he was telling me of a small band of volunteers here on the reserve, and that they gather on the second Saturday each month for a work party. He suggested that if I have an interest in conservation and wildlife I should definitely pop down to the next meeting, that I'd really enjoy it. So I did, and I do!



I've been interested in wildlife for as long as I can remember, occasionally nurturing vague plans to volunteer somewhere, never getting round to it. I love the idea of making a contribution to conservation efforts, whether it be at home or as part of a community group.

The great benefit of volunteering, for me, was the chance to meet people with that same enthusiasm for preserving wild spaces, getting together to manage those small valuable patches of wilderness, and the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the local ecology. It has been great to see the progress made at Cromwell Bottom over the last couple of years, both in the developments at the reserve itself and in the way that interest has risen among the wider community: that 'small band of volunteers' I joined in 2015 isn't quite so small now! The

amount of hard work put into every project (the construction of the dipping pond particularly comes to mind) as well as the general upkeep of the whole site, is inspiring. I can't wait to see where we'll be after a few more years.

# All About Swallows

Images and article: Allan Wolfenden

## Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

The Swallow is a common sight on the reserve in spring having flown 10,000 kilometres from South



Africa. It can be seen throughout spring, summer and into early autumn before it makes its long and hazardous return journey. Though it is possible to get a few very early arrivals in March most arrive here in the UK in April and stay until September or early October. The Swallow's dark glossy blue back, pale undersides and rust coloured throat make it one of our most elegant summer migrant visitors to the UK. They are very agile fliers and use their long tail streamers to help them twist and turn in flight as they pursue flying insects, catching them in their open mouths. It is a delight to watch them feeding over the reserve, a sight which never ceases to excite and thrill me.

Swallows nest in barns, outbuildings and under the eaves of houses, building an open cup shaped nest on ledges that are situated above ground away from ground predators. Their nest is made from plant material which is cemented together by mud and saliva



collected in their mouths. Where nesting opportunities are more difficult to come by, swallows have been known to use artificial nests which have been used by breeding pairs to provide suitable nesting opportunities. Nest building takes a lot of energy and effort. It is estimated in a recent BTO study that it may take 1300 trips to collect mud pellets in order to bind their nest together. It's not surprising therefore that many Swallows choose to repair previous nests rather than completely rebuild a new one. It means that they can get on sooner with the urgent task of creating the next generation.

The Swallows breeding season can fluctuate and its success is very much dependant on the weather. If conditions are good, and there are lots of flying insects available, Swallows can have two and possibly three broods while they are here. The nest can contain four

or five eggs which are incubated for about eighteen days. The young swallows are fed by both parents and it has been estimated that parents may at times feed their young four hundred times in a day. Juvenile swallows leave the nest after about twenty days.

It is estimated that there are about 570,000 breeding pairs of Swallows in the UK. Swallows in the UK are classified as Amber List species under Birds of Conservation Concern review. This was possibly been brought about by changes in South Africa, where they spend the winter, the hazards they face on their migration route across the Sahara Desert and a reduction of insects in some areas due to changes in farming practices.

We celebrate their presence with us on and over the reserve but we cannot take them for granted. Loss of suitable habitat for feeding and breeding continues to mean they face immense challenges, not least finding suitable nesting places.

For further information on swallows [click on the links](#) below:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Barn\\_Swallow](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Barn_Swallow)

<https://www.bto.org/search/node/swallow>

# Cromwell Bottom Bird Survey 2017

Project leader: Mike Henshaw : article: Jane Uttley, Images: Allan Wolfenden, Barry Nield, Graham Haigh.

This year the Wildlife Group are conducting a monthly Bird Survey on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in the month to give us a formal record of the birds present on the Reserve through-out the year.

Our first one was on the 28<sup>th</sup> January. Approximately 8 people split into 2 groups to try to cover the area in about 2 hours. One group went onto North Loop returning through the newly planted woodland and the feeding station at the cabin. The other group went as far as the Avocet buildings returning via Pixie wood, the ski lake, the sphagnum bog and the feeding station

The weather was very unhelpful; pouring rain and foggy; temperature 4C to start with. However, after about an hour it started to brighten up and the birds appeared.

The second group were disappointed that they had not found many species, especially on the ski lake and we think this can only be explained by the increased useage of the ski lake. The first group were surprised to find 2 large flocks feeding on North Loop one of redwings 80+ and one of wood pigeons 200+

Both groups could report good numbers of small birds were seen at the feeding stations, highlighting the necessity of keeping these 'topped up' during the winter.

We would love you to come along and help us as we can't always cover the whole reserve and so are missing some species. There is a list in the cabin of the species seen in 2016.

If you know that we have missed anything off the list below, please get in touch.



## Species List : Saturday 28 January 2017

Black headed gull	50	Grey wagtail	1	Wood pigeon	200+
Blackbird	11	Jackdaw	8	Reed bunting	1
Blue tit	19	Linnet	10+		
Bullfinch	3	Long tailed tit	26		
Canada goose	6	Magpie	7		
Carrion Crow	5	Mallard	8		
Chaffinch	8	Meadow pipit	4		
Coal tit	1	Mistle thrush	1		
Common gull	2	Moorhen	2		
Comorant	8	Nuthatch	1		
Dunnock	5	Redwing	60+		
Goldfinch	2	Robin	12		
Gooseander	1	Stock dove	2		
Great tit	9	Teal	10		



Jay: Barry Nield

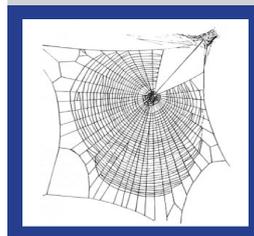
(Images above: Bullfinch, Dunnock, Blue tit, Redwing, Jay above right)

For further information about the Bird Survey 2017 please contact Mike or Jane at the Cabin.

# The Missing-sector Orb Weaver

Article: Bruce Hoyle

One of the spiders that frequent near our houses is *Zygiella x-notata*, or *Missing-sector Orb Weaver*, so called because of a missing V-shaped opening - which make them look damaged in some way. This species builds



her web in our window frames, door frames, fences and nearby bushes. Related to the garden spider she can grow up to 10mm long, males somewhat less. She has a distinct "oak leaf" pattern on her back. The spider is not often seen during the day as she retreats into the corner of her lair with a leg touching her signal thread.

The web she builds is the most interesting of all our local Araneidae (orb weavers). As the title says, the web has a sector missing. There are several suggestions as to why she does this. First of all how can she make a web like this? There are a few ways: she can build the spiral to the sector she wants missing and do a quick turnaround to the other side and then

back again leaving a sector unthreaded. Alternatively a complete web is made and the section she needs clear is bitten away, problem solved! Confused? Its better if you look at the picture (above left).

**But why does she do this anyway?**



Remember where the web is – in a window frame mostly, and close to the glass. The signal thread has to be angled away from the orb and only connected to the web hub and her leg in her silk tube so the missing sector provides a clear un snagged run. When prey is detected by her leg the signal line will then provide a fast clear run to the hub and then on to the trapped insect.

If she builds a web in a more open site then she has a choice to build a full web or not. Spiders can be very versatile.

At dusk, when they cannot be easily seen they usually frequent the web centre. They breed in autumn, usually September. This species can remain active throughout the winter months.

Now that we are close to spring the young will be hatching and trying their luck with building their own lairs, some successful, others fall by the

wayside. Remember that any web with an open sector you see close to your house will be *Zygiella*. Click on the link below for further info.

<http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/Summary/s/Zygiella+x-notata>

**Image above: *Zygiella x-notata* : credited to: Leonard Vincent.**

Any enquiries please contact [CBWG.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:CBWG.newsletter@gmail.com)

## Members' trip on Saturday April 1st

We thought you may be interested in visits to local nature reserves for members, not only to see the birds but also to understand how they organise their reserve. The first one will be a full day's visit to the RSPB reserve at **FAIRBURN INGS**, near Castleford.

The site is part of the Aire valley which was once a coal mining area. The open areas of water are formed when subsidence of coal workings underground took place but it has been extensively landscaped to give a good variety of habitats and so attracts lots of different types of birds, small garden birds, wintering wildfowl, migrating waders and warblers.

There is a visitors' centre with drinks and snacks from a vending machine, though usually we take our own lunches which can be eaten in the centre. Toilets are on site.

Make sure you dress for the weather and though the paths are mainly good there could be large puddles if it has recently rained, so boots are usually necessary.

To enjoy birds properly you will need some binoculars and a camera is useful if you want to record some of them. If you are a member of RSPB bring your card so admission is free, otherwise, for non-members the cost is £3.00 per car. We shall meet in the carpark at Cromwell Bottom at 9.15am and car share from there. It is about 50 mins to the reserve. We will probably leave around 3 pm or whatever suits. You could also meet us at Fairburn Ings at 10.30am or obtain directions from [Jane Uttley 07950 497923](tel:07950497923) or

[janeuttley@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:janeuttley@blueyonder.co.uk)

# Herons and Foxes feeding on Water Voles ...

Article and image: Steve Blacksmith, Chair, Halifax Scientific Society.

I read with interest that Herons feed readily on Water Voles in British Wildlife December 2005, in 'Wildlife Reports' compiled by Andrew Branson. ( I would be glad to provide a scan of the article, please contact the Editor at [cbwg.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:cbwg.newsletter@gmail.com) for this).

It is probably not surprising that foxes feed on water vole, but we imagine predator/prey balancing. Perhaps these two native predators plus mink conspire to the complete annihilation of Water Voles. All three are adaptable predators, so if one prey disappears, they can switch to another.

There were Water Voles everywhere along the watersides in the 1960s when I was a kid. They were all along the Siddal Valley as far as the Nestle Factory, living along with Moorhens in stretches of the Halifax Branch Canal that had not yet been filled in. I also remember walking along the Calder and Hebble to around about Cromwell Bottom and seeing them along there. You heard them if you didn't see them, as they plopped noisily into the water. Unfortunately I also used to see youths with air rifles out shooting the "Water Rats". They would often sit in full view nibbling the water plants - the voles that is, not the shooters.



So there are three new predators (Foxes were rarely seen in the 1960s, and Herons never) plus far fewer quiet stretches of swampy overgrown water. One human factor (the shooting) seems to have disappeared, but another, the use of canals by pleasure boats, has grown. However, Nigel from CBWG thought he saw one in the bottom pond while working on the new dipping platform, so with a bit of luck, there are a few clinging on, or coming in from other areas. I wonder if some kind of mesh tunnels among the water plants, along Tag Cut, protecting the Water Voles from predators, would make a difference? There are numerous rust-free mesh cages thrown down the wood along Hag Lane in Shibden where they were dumped after the animal rights activists released the mink at the Swalesmoor Fur Farm. If they kept mink in, they could keep them out.

(The photo above is one I took last June at Winnel Moor Nature Reserve, Winchester. Water Voles are in good numbers there)

For further information please click on the links below:

<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/watervole>

<http://www.mammal.org.uk/mc-events/water-vole-conservation-and-ecology/>

## Editor comment:

Another big factor in the reduction of water vole numbers was the habitat loss. Many natural haunts were built on land converted for other uses. Human disturbance plays a big factor in the vole population along the canal system of this country; increased boat and barge use and increased foot traffic all affecting the water vole population.

Please email [CBWG.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:CBWG.newsletter@gmail.com) to debate these points. Thanks, Ed.

# BUILDING A NEW POND DIPPING PLATFORM

(and the photos to prove it!)

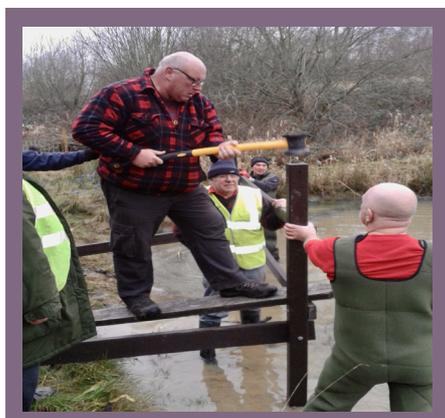
article and images by Jane Utlley, Simon Day et al.



Walk up to Tag ponds and see the amazing work that has been done on building the pond dipping platform.



Over the weekend of January 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> a band of stalwart volunteers including Graham Haigh, David Langley, David H, Allan Wolfenden, Alan, Nigel Reed and Simon Day were seen to be splashing energetically around in the water hammering in the upright posts, some of them to a depth of 1.5 metres. It was very hard work but once the first post was in situ then the rest followed which was (allegedly) a little easier! Climbing gear, carabiners and wet suits were all in full use!



A ramp for wheelchair access is now built, along with a fence for safety. A wheelchair friendly pathway is to follow. Many thanks to Fletcher Brothers of Halifax who manufactured the components and to Graham for negotiating a fair price. Funding was provided by People's Postcode Lottery. A brass plaque will be put up in the near future and the Wildlife Group look forward to promoting the new facility to local schools, cubs, brownies, scouts, and welcoming children from all over West Yorkshire



Mike, Nigel, Simon, David L, Allan, David H.

# PHOTOGRAPHY DAYS

Article: Barry Nield

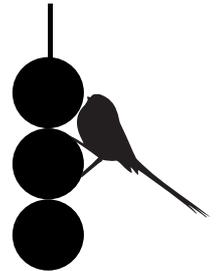
On the **28th January** which turned out to be a rainy, misty morning 4 people turned up for our first Photography Day this year.

It was too dismal to go outside with our precious camera gear for most of the morning, but some were pretty new to the digital camera scene and had many questions regarding the general settings and techniques of photography. We stayed in the Cabin and discussed basic principles and bombarded them with information. I think answered all their questions and then some!

Fortunately near to the end the weather perked up a little and we tried a few snaps around the feeders at the cabin, testing some of the things discussed earlier and explaining the effects of some settings on the actual pictures taken.



On the **25th February** we had our second Photography Day and it started the same as the previous one ... Dismal! After about an hour a bit of brightness broke through and the rain stopped. This time we spent a bit of time in two groups, one down at the original feeding area and the other at the cabin feeders. Our visitors that day got a bit more hands on with taking pictures, many shots could be looked at and techniques discussed as we went along. Light and dark backgrounds of the subjects was the most practised and after a few adjustments to settings, all were taking better exposed shots of the birds.



All the visitors seemed to enjoy themselves, they got some good advice, had a bit of a laugh, took some pictures of the birds and when they left they hopefully had got some useful information about whatever it was that they may have been struggling with.



Everyone welcome, facilities on-site and it doesn't matter what type of camera you have, even mobile phones can be good! We can offer help and advice every Sunday afternoon!

## WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ



Question 1: The direct train from Bradford to London passes at least two Nature Reserves before leaving Yorkshire. Name two of them.

Question 2: Which Act of Parliament created the power to establish Nature Reserves and National Parks in England and Wales?

Question 3: Name the bird, seen on local rivers, that shares its name with constellations of stars.

Question 4: Which land uses, in the Pennines, have been blamed for worsening the recent floods along the Calder Valley?

Question 5: As a child, I threw darts which clung to the clothes of many victims. On which grasses do these flower heads grow?

Question 6: Kathleen Jamie wrote about the wildlife around her, but never lost sight of her domestic realities. What was her book called?

(answers on the back page, but no peeking!!)

## BIRDS:

GUIDED BIRD WALK: **SUNDAY 12 March 10.00-2.00:** free event: refreshments at end.

MONTHLY BIRD COUNT: **THIRD SATURDAY IN EVERY MONTH:** 10.00am free, refreshments at end.

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## NEWTS AND MOTHS:

**Monthly events to be arranged:** please keep a look out on the blogsite for details: [cromwellBottom.wordpress.com](http://cromwellBottom.wordpress.com) or email [cromwellBottom@gmail.com](mailto:cromwellBottom@gmail.com).

**NEWT spotting:** come and test out the new Pond Dipping Platform and see what newts are around.

**MOTH NIGHTS** is a monthly project led by Barry Nield, details TBA.

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## THREE TREE WALKS - led by Bel Hale:

### BARK, BRANCHES AND BUDS!

**SUNDAY 9th April** meet in the car park at **1.30** for a 2 hour walk around the nature reserve (about 2 miles on easy paths) to observe and identify the trees when some of them have catkins, but before most leaves appear. Free event; donations welcome, refreshments available at the end.

### SOLSTICE SPLENDOUR!

**SUNDAY 25th June** meet in the car park at **1.30** for a 2 hour walk on easy paths but this time observing and identifying trees when they are 'dressed' in their beautiful early summer foliage. Free event; donations welcome, refreshments available at the end.

### AUTUMN GLORY

**SUNDAY 29 October** meet in the car park at **1.30** for a 2 hour walk on easy paths to observe and identify the trees when they are 'wearing' their glorious autumn colours. Free event; donations welcome, refreshments available at the end.

Further info: [cromwellBottom@gmail.com](mailto:cromwellBottom@gmail.com)

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## CBWG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 26th April 2017 at 7.30pm

Mulberry Suite, Brighthouse 6th Form College, off Parsonage Lane, Brighthouse HD6 1FG

The meeting will include an election of people to serve on the committee for a 12 month period. Any member wishing to be nominated please contact Allan Wolfenden or any member of the committee. Please forward nominations to Allan by 31 March 2017 by post, (phone Allan for postal address) or by phone, or email.

phone: 07810 004401

email: [WolfendenAllan@hotmail.com](mailto:WolfendenAllan@hotmail.com)

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## WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ - ANSWERS

1. Cromwell Bottom and Potteric Carr are easily seen. Other answers may include Pugneys Country Park, Wakefield, though this is not easily seen from the train - you may see gulls and geese rising from the lakes south of the track between Mirfield and Wakefield Kirkgate. There may be others!
2. National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
3. Dipper.
4. Grouse shooting and sheep farming in the hills and factory and house building in the valley.
5. Wall Barley - *Hordeum murinum*
6. Findings.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Volunteers are the foundation upon which our wildlife group is built. Our work helps secure the future of many precious habitats and species, enabling them to thrive. We have many jobs to do, so no matter how much time you have there is ALWAYS something for you!

**THURSDAY MORNINGS weekly at 9.30am** is a good time to come and help. Please check our blogsite for updates about access whilst Crowther Bridge is being repaired.

**SECOND SATURDAY of each monthy at 9.30am** are our work parties arranged with Calderdale Council. Please come along to either, or both, and again please check our blogsite.

We can promise good fun, a sense of achievement and a sit down with the group at the end for a well-earned cuppa!

## HOW TO CONTACT US:



[cromwellBottom@gmail.com](mailto:cromwellBottom@gmail.com) : For general enquiries or about membership.



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