CROMWELL BOTTOM WILDLIFE GROUP MAGAZINE

AUT/ WINTER 2026/7

Issue 25

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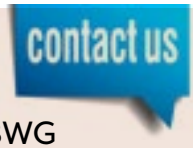
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Welcome to our Autumn/Winter magazine!

What a hot summer we have had which, in turn, has left winners and losers in the natural world at Cromwell Bottom!

It's been a great year for butterflies which you can read about in our butterfly section, including three rare sightings!

On the other hand, the extended dry weather has presented some real challenges for our volunteers as they spent weeks watering recently planted shrubs and trees, to keep them alive.

Looking to the future, you may be interested to read in the article about our plans for the next few years as we aim to improve the sustainability of habitats and diversity across the reserve.

All this and more in the coming pages. With huge thanks to all our contributors and, of course, to our wonderful 'magazine team' for producing another fascinating publication!

Simon Day
Chair CBWG

Around the Reserve

Pheasant Tales!

Think I'll strut my stuff ...



Oh yes do, I'm busy with this tree ...



I'd fly away if I were you, madam!



All's well that ends well!



Cinnabar caterpillar on Ragwort near to pond



Cinnabar - original caterpillar image taken in July 2026 - it stayed for ten days! Text below copied from Wildlife Trust website.

"These pretty black and red moths are often confused for butterflies! Their black and yellow caterpillars are a common sight on ragwort plants. The caterpillar's bright colours warn predators not to eat them!



Scientific name of moth -

Tyria jacobaeae

Info and image of moth taken from The Wildlife Trust website.

FEATURE

The Decline of Swifts at Cromwell Bottom

Mike Henshaw





The decline of swifts, in my opinion, started 60 years ago in the 1960's when we had a lot of house building and major roadworks.
Then came the decline of mills throughout the country, where swifts naturally nested. Mills were either demolished or turned into apartments, which had waterproofed roofs leaving no access for birds. It is acknowledged that as house building has increased, resulting in less green space, this means fewer insects and less food for the birds. On top of that we have climate change, avian flu and a 53% drop in all migratory birds. Swifts are roof nesting birds, as are house sparrows and starlings. The country has now woken up and is implementing swift bricks in new housing developments to try and increase nest sites.

A swift cannot land to breed other than in a box or roof space. Their wings are too long and legs too short and too far back along the body.

We installed swift boxes at Cromwell Bottom and had two broods in 2025 and two in 2026. We have photos but not good enough to print.



We do hope that the youngsters from our two broods will come back to Cromwell Bottom to breed in the future, however they do not breed until two years old. Prior to breeding they may well come back to site but cannot breed.

All images credit David Moreton, courtesy of Swift Conservation

www.swift-conservation.org

FEATURE

Tales from the River Bank

Current Ideas for a Hedgelaying Project along the Riverside Path

Robin Dalton and Shelagh Brooke

A hedge runs along one side of the path that leads to the weir.



Hedgelaying is a centuries-old practice for maintaining a hedge in a way that rejuvenates it, ensuring that it remains an effective barrier. Such hedges provide extremely important habitats for many species of wildlife.

The Cromwell Bottom riverside hedge was laid in 2009 (so before the formation of the Wildlife Group) by Calderdale Council staff, volunteers and members of the then BTCV. After 17 years, it would benefit from being laid again (as is the convention). It contains mainly hawthorn with some blackthorn, both of which respond well to hedgelaying.

Hedgelaying is carried out in winter when the plants involved are dormant and before the bird nesting season starts. Firstly, weak stems and general undergrowth are removed. Straight, healthy stems of an appropriate diameter (pleachers) are retained. Each pleacher is cut about three-quarters of the way through close to its base, so that it can be bent over at an angle but can continue to grow. Vertical stakes are driven in at intervals and the bent pleachers woven around them. Also, binders are inserted along the top. New shoots grow from each pleacher and from each partially cut stub at its base. Given regional variations in hedgelaying styles, this project would adopt a local form of this Yorkshire approach.



Photo reprinted with the kind permission of Sarah Whitehead
https://hedgelaying.org.uk

FEATURE

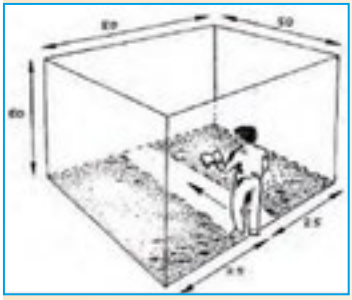
Butterfly Observations 2026

Lesley Lace, Senior Lecturer Ecology, Manchester University

Species and Numbers of Individuals Recorded on 7 Repeats of the Transect Between April & August in 2025 and 2026

	2025	2026
Small White (Pieris rapia)	64	94
Large White (Pieris brassica)	10	7
Orange tip (Anthocharis cardamines)	28	15
Green veined White (Pieris napi)	15	22
Red Admiral (Vanessa atalanta)	1	8
Comma (Polygonia c-album)	6	2
Small tortoiseshell (Aglais urticae)	4	2
Speckled Wood (Pararge aegeria)	23	53
*Painted Lady (Vanessa cardui)	0	1
Peacock (Inachis io)	23	12
Meadow Brown (Maniola jurtina)	147	744
Small Skipper (Thymelicus sylvestris)	17	46
Small Heath (Coenonympha pamphilus)	32	44
Small Copper (Lycaena phlaeas)	5	2
Ringlet (Aphantopus hyperantus)	94	47
Gate Keeper (Pyronia tithonus)	152	327
Common Blue (Polyommatus icarus)	4	35
*Holly Blue (Celestrina argiolus)	0	1
*Silver-washed Fritillary (Argynnis paphia)	0	1
1 Six-Spot Burnet Moth (Zygaena filipendulae)	16	4
Cinnabar Moth (Tyria jacobaeae)	1	1

Above - listed in red with asterisk - rare for our recording dates.



This is the method I have used over the last two years, to monitor species and their relative abundance at CB.





In the UK there are 58 resident and 2 regularly occurring migrant butterfly species. Butterflies are important indicators of the state of the environment as they are highly sensitive to environmental conditions and have rapid lifecycles.
Since 1976 the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) has used a survey method to monitor butterfly populations year-on-year; this involves walking a fixed-route (transect) and recording all sightings within an imaginary 5m box (see diagram to the left).
In 2025, 16 butterfly species and two day-flying moths were recorded. In 2026, 19 species were seen, which included three new records (*). The most exciting of these was the Silver-washed Fritillary (left). Holly Blue above that, Painted lady picture on next page.

FEATURE

Painted Lady Butterflies

Simon Day

The Painted Lady Butterfly (adapted from an article in The Observer, June 2026)

This year has been a vintage year for Painted Lady butterflies in the UK. The previous one was 17 years ago.

The Uk is a key stopping off point in an extraordinary, multiple – generation migration of these remarkable insects as they fly from Africa to the Arctic Circle. Huge numbers gather in sub-tropical Africa during winter before crossing the Sahara Desert in spring and into Northern Europe in the summer. Over maybe three or four generations, the annual round trip can cover up to 9,000 miles, all with the ambition to fly towards the North Pole. They have the capability to move from egg to adult in less than six weeks!

The lack of vegetation over the Saraha forces them to cross it in one go, but their food source become more abundant as they travel north. Caterpillars commonly gorge on such plants as Mallow, Plantain and Thistle.

Why were so many recorded here in 2026?

The sun appeared at the right time as the adults emerged. A shortage of parasitic wasps and flies also helped their cause. Research has shown that, as Painted Ladies make their way back south, they make use of tailwinds at 500m or higher at a ground speed of 30mph as they once again, through the generations, reach the African Tropics.



credit Mike Henshaw

We were delighted to have seen evidence of Painted Ladies at Cromwell Bottom in the summer of 2026, a heartening story set against the backdrop of decimated butterfly species in the UK

FOCUS ON A VOLUNTEER

Gabby - gap year student



I had chosen Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve as the location to carry out my A-level Geography coursework on how humans impact biodiversity. This made it the perfect site to choose because it's incredibly diverse with a great group of volunteers who work very hard to conserve it. I also chose Cromwell because I have enjoyed visiting it growing up and therefore seen first hand the vast number of species that call Cromwell Bottom home, which was proved also throughout my coursework.

I carried out my coursework in three different sites around the reserve that vary in human interaction and conservation. These sites were next to the river, the main bird feeding area and one of the meadows. Through collecting data on animal species, plant species, the site itself and people's opinions, my overall conclusion was that the conservation the volunteers take part in has a noticeably positive impact on biodiversity around the reserve compared to places that have less interactions which was proved through lots of data collection and graphs.

Whilst carrying out my coursework I spoke to the volunteers who were very welcoming, enthusiastic and helpful throughout my visits which encouraged me to become a volunteer during my gap year. After learning, through my coursework, what an excellent impact the volunteers have had on the reserve, this made me want to join and learn how to help continue the brilliant work that they do.

I am really enjoying my volunteering because I'm learning conservation skills through hands on experience whilst being part of a great team. My favourite part so far has been going on a guided walk during the open day. It was very fascinating to learn about the reserve and it was great to see how enthusiastic the people on the walk were when they were listening and asking questions.

Our Work with Schools Simon Day

Over the last year, we have been visited by a record number of classes, 39 in total, from 13 different primary schools.
Our aim is to support the particular curriculum area and themes which are being followed in school, by providing 'hands on' activities and themed walks in an outdoor environment.
We continue to be able to offer pond dipping, minibeast hunting, den building, birdwatching and life cycle sessions. Themed seasonal walks are also available. Feedback from schools tells us that these are memorable visits with most schools wanting to return for the same sessions the following year. It is particularly rewarding to see children appreciate what a nature reserve has to offer, especially as for some, it can be an environment they have never visited before.
Much thanks must go to our education 'team' as without their great support, we would not be able to provide such opportunities.







FEATURE

CBWG Five Year Sustainabiliy Plan

Simon Day

CBWG, in partnership with Calderdale Countryside Service, put together a 5-year plan which covers many aspects of reserve management.

We are currently drafting our plans for the next 5 years, with a clear focus on 'sustainability'. In a nutshell, our plans cover a number of environmental aims, under the headings of:

Habitat and landscape restoration, biodiversity and species recovery, grassland, woodland and wetland management, climate action and community led involvement.

Many of these involve restoring habitats which are under threat from climate change or other factors and how we might improve the wildlife diversity and population within them.

Our most exciting project currently is continuing our creation of a sensory glade within the Education Area. The work so far has been funded by Northern Power and we are looking to find funds which will enable us to create a special multi-sensory area, in the next phase.
One of the things we consider a priority, amongst all this, is to establish clear records of what wildlife exists at the moment on the reserve.

We need to know what we have before we start to quantify the impact of our work.

We have agreed to focus on particular species which we already hold records on so we can determine any improvements.
We often get asked about what species exist on the reserve so hopefully, in time, we will have more information to pass on!

Sensory Glade

As you may have read in the Chair's welcome, we are in the process of creating a sensory glade. An existing section of the Education Area has been totally re landscaped which has included the building of planters and other wooden features. We are now entering the next phase where we need to purchase native species of plants and shrubs which will provide a multi-sensory experience.

To hear more about our project, go to You Tube and type in:

'Cromwell Bottom Sensory Glade'

This was put together by Northern Power to on 5th June 2026, to mark 'World Environment Day'.

FEATURE

Sustainability
at Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group

Tony Spilsbury, David Langley, Simon Day

Cromwell Bottom — making sustainability part of everything we do

At Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve, sustainability isn't just an ambition for the future — it is something we have been putting into practice for many years.

Our reserve is a remarkable example of what can be achieved when nature is given the opportunity to recover. Once a quarry, ash disposal site and landfill, Cromwell Bottom has been transformed into a thriving mosaic of woodland, wetlands, meadows, ponds and lagoons. Today it is recognised as one of Calderdale's important wildlife sites.

Our ambition is to make Cromwell Bottom an even better place for wildlife and people, while reducing the environmental impact of our own activities. Over the past few years, we have already made some important changes.

Turning waste into a resource

One of our most successful initiatives has been our aluminium can recycle scheme, pioneered by our Vice Chair, David Langley. Through the recycling of cans collected at the reserve, we now recycle well over 400,000 drinks cans annually, generating over £1,200 which we can use on our improvement initiatives. This is a great example of how something that might otherwise become waste can instead provide valuable income to support our conservation work. Thank you to all our donors!



We have also started recycling cardboard into compost, rather than simply sending it away as waste. The resulting compost has been used around the reserve, returning nutrients to the soil and reducing the need to bring in other materials.

It's a simple idea, but it perfectly demonstrates the approach we want to take: reduce waste, reuse what we can and put resources back into the reserve.

Harnessing the power of the sun

We have also taken steps towards generating our own renewable energy, with the installation of five solar panels. This was made possible through a grant from Rastrick Big Local and the efforts of our Chair, Simon. The final funding project from RBL brought together eight Rastrick based organisations, including a church, a sports club, a bowling club and Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group. After many productive meetings, all organisations were keen to utilise the available funding to reduce their energy costs. After a tendering process, Green View Projects, based in Elland, were awarded the contract of installing solar panel systems into each organisation.
Our solar panels, battery and converter were duly installed, along with a water heater which now provides constant hot water for drinks and washing up.



During the summer months, these panels contribute over a third of our energy needs; an important step towards reducing our reliance on conventional electricity and lowering the carbon footprint of the reserve.

We hope that this will be the beginning of further opportunities to use renewable energy wherever it is practical and affordable.

Small changes can make a difference

We've also changed the tea bags we use at the reserve to biodegradable plastic-free alternatives. For many visitors, a cup of tea is an important part of a visit to Cromwell Bottom. By making this relatively small change, we can ensure that something as everyday as making a cup of tea doesn't contribute unnecessary plastic waste.

Sustainability is about more than recycling

Our sustainability ambitions go beyond the changes we make in the visitor centre.

The conservation work undertaken across the reserve — managing wetlands, woodland and grassland, protecting important habitats and encouraging biodiversity is at the heart of what we do at Cromwell Bottom.

This year we have once again implemented a plan to eliminate Himalayan Balsam from six key areas of the reserve. This year-on-year initiative keeps balsam at bay and allows native plants to flourish in its place. This year we started clearing the riverside; it will take several years effort to determine how successful this will be.

We also recognise that a sustainable future depends on people. Our volunteers give their time and practical skills to maintain the reserve, carry out conservation work and help visitors understand and appreciate the natural environment.

Looking to the future

We have already made a good start with plenty more to do. Check out page 11 in this magazine where our Chair, Simon, highlights the 5-year plan we are embarking on with sustainability as a key constituent.

Thank you to everyone who contributes to this vital work in looking after our nature reserve.

Calderdale Community Spirit Awards

Martin Staples

> **"Volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless."**

Sherry Anderson's pithy statement perfectly summarises the outstanding work conducted by so many people who volunteer at Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve. Visitors comment on the contributions our volunteers make to preserve, maintain and develop the reserve for the benefit and pleasure of others. This work is carried out all year, in all weathers, and is testimony to the collaborative ethos nurtured over many years.

It is therefore all the more rewarding when such work is recognised by the voluntary sector. Recent visitors may have seen a set of photographs adorning the wall of the Visitor Centre together with a trophy. Back in May, Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group was honoured to be shortlisted for the "Sustainability" category at the Calderdale Community Spirit Awards, hosted by the Community Foundation for Calderdale. This prestigious evening, informally referred to as 'The Voluntary Sector's Oscars', was held at The Venue, Barkisland. The category recognises clear actions to protect the environment and support a more sustainable Calderdale.





Left to right:
David Langley
Simon Day
Martin Staples

Over 400 people attended the evening to recognise and honour the immense contribution volunteers make across Calderdale in a variety of categories. Simon, David and myself represented the group and we were delighted when Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group was announced as the winner in our particular category. The awards committee recognised our commitment to recycling, our use of renewable energy with the solar panels on the Visitor Centre, together with our ever-increasing links with schools and a wide range of community groups/partnerships who visit the reserve.

Although we picked up the award and posed for the photographs, Simon rightly recognised and paid tribute to the magnificent work of all our volunteers. We all volunteer because we have a love of nature and wildlife as well as a desire to share it for the public to discover and enjoy. Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve is widely regarded as a jewel in the Calderdale landscape. With the continued commitment of our 'priceless' volunteers it will continue to shine for years to come.

Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group was nominated by Gillian Wrigley, lead officer for the Calderdale Sphagnum Project.The Wildlife Group are very grateful to Gillian for her nomination.

Calendars and Caps Robin Owen-Morley

Following the success of our calendars for the last couple of years, we launched our fabulous Wildlife Group calendar for 2027 at the Open Day. 24 photographers had submitted 68 images and a panel of four trustees had the unenviable task of selecting the thirteen that would make up the calendar with a variety of beautiful photos that showcase the reserve. And this year, every contributor was offered a free copy as a thank you for having a go! The calendars are available from the Visitor Centre for just £8 each.

In addition, at the Open Day, we launched our top quality CBWG baseball caps which are also available from the Visitor Centre priced at £10 each.

Either, or both, would make a fantastic Christmas present - sorry to mention the C word already!





The Wanderer Returns!

Jane Uttley



Hi everyone I am Jane Uttley. Many of you won't know but I used to work in what was then the small container used as a café and meeting room. This has now been replaced by that very substantial Visitor Centre. The volunteers have been working really hard to achieve this very acceptable place.

I stopped coming down to the reserve as much when I lost some of my eyesight and couldn't drive. I continued to come down when my husband drove me, but then I lost my husband so making my way to the reserve was difficult.

I was so excited to come down again and I wasn't disappointed. I was really surprised to see all the work that had been accomplished by the amazing volunteers. It was a pleasure to walk round the area. The paths have been made accessible for wheelchairs and buggies so that now all people can visit the various places and habitats, especially along by the lagoon and river. I also walked up North Loop. Henshaw's Hide is absolutely amazing so professional and easy to use. Also up there are lots of wildflowers making a lovely wildflower meadow.

It was always a dream of mine to use the reserve as an educational resource showing people the various habitats and the different wildlife that lived in each, including the migrating birds, foxes and badgers that are occasionally seen.

I was so pleased to see that lots more school children are coming down for their outdoor education and Simon seems to have been the leading light in all of this, though of course once again he needs volunteers to help with the guided walks and various activities. I do feel it is so necessary to give young people the opportunity to gain access to wildlife and nature as a whole just as the rest of us enjoy.

I'm sure you will succeed in continuing to bring the joys of this reserve including the tea and cakes we all enjoy after the dogs are given their walks. Certainly Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve will continue to provide these pleasurable activities and enjoyment of nature. I do hope to be able to come down again in the near future.

Jane

WHY DO WE VISIT
Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve?

Comments from our visitors, compiled by Martin Staples



We asked a number of our regular visitors to the reserve what it is that makes the place so special for them. Below are the responses they provided.

I enjoy the variety of wildlife found in the different habitats throughout the reserve, particularly as the seasons change. The exercise through easy walking has helped my recuperation after recent surgery. There is always a friendly atmosphere in the Visitor Centre with good company guaranteed.
Kevin Murgatroyd

If you're looking for tranquility, mental space and the joy of observing wildlife then Cromwell Bottom is the place to be. We love to sit outside at the Visitor Centre in all weathers feeling the community spirit while enjoying a hot drink. Simple pleasures!
Steve and Alanna

We have been coming to Cromwell for over fourteen years. Every year we meet lots of people with whom we are now very friendly. The reserve is a lovely, tranquil place to visit with lots to see. After having spent time on a relaxing walk, we come back to the Visitor Centre for a cup of tea where all the volunteers make you feel very welcome.
Anne and Tony

I visit throughout the year and each season brings a different feel to the place on my walks. The variety of birds is a pleasure to watch and animals sometimes cross your path when you least expect. The setting between canal and river makes it more special. Coffee and cake and a chat to some lovely people make it well worth a visit.
Jon Priestley

Open Day

Martin Staples

The sun shone, the rain held off and visitors flocked to CBWG's Open Day to enjoy our annual celebration of the nature reserve, together with many exhibitors and charity stalls, both old and new, with whom we have forged partnerships over the years.

It was wonderful to see so many people attend the event across the age range with some travelling significant distances to be with us. Of course, there were our regular visitors to the reserve with familiar smiling faces everywhere you looked but there were many first-time visitors and plenty of families enjoying the attractions on offer.

The pond dipping sessions were extremely popular with the youngsters excitedly dipping their nets to discover what lurked beneath the surface. Our knowledgeable volunteers were on hand to describe what was caught before being released gently back into the pond. Not the volunteers I hasten to add!

The guided walks were well attended and took our guests to areas of the reserve usually off limits to visitors. David and Allan provided the informative commentaries to enhance the experience.

The Visitor Centre was under siege most of the day serving refreshments and the volunteers did a magnificent job coping with the demand. Elsewhere, the raffle did brisk business, memberships were taken out or renewed and the 2027 calendars made their first appearance together with CBWG branded caps. Our guest exhibitors and charities drew large audiences with the latter raising valuable money for their respective good causes.

The Open Day is many months in the planning and sees frenetic activity in the week leading up to the event. None of it would be possible without the commitment and hard work of the trustees and wonderful volunteers who strive to put on a day for all to enjoy. Within a couple of hours of finishing, the paddock was cleared, tents and marquees stored away and the visitors long since returned home. A casual passer-by would be forgiven for not realising what had taken place earlier in the day. Silence had descended on the reserve. But somewhere, thoughts were already turning to next year's celebration.



Preparing for the event

....and now - the pictures!

Afternoon cabin crew





David Langley Project Director





Kirklees College Animal Centre

Shibden Valley Falconry

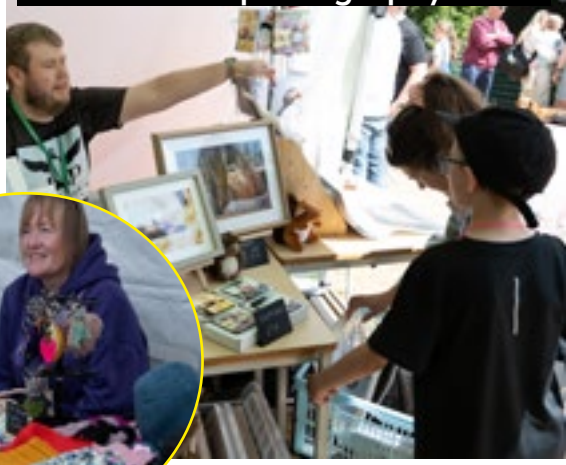




Supervised pond dipping



At our wildlife photography stall





Face Painting





Live Poets Society

The World About Us

Wilderness is not a place ...
It's a river where a kingfisher darts, electric blue as it disappears.
It's a stream where a dipper bobs like a dapper waiter!
It's a pond where a dabchick dives up and down, light as a cork.
It's a lake where two grebes dance their wonderful ballet
It's a wood full of birdsong, the dawn chorus, individual yet corporate.
It's a mountain, majestic home of eagle, king of its domain!
Surely we should protect God's creation ...
for Wilderness is a place!

John D. Wilcock



image credit Malcolm Salter