



# **Wildlife Friendly Otley Annual Report**

## **1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021**



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## Foreword

Considering the pressures, challenges and limits imposed by the pandemic both individually and collectively, Wildlife Friendly Otley has not only managed to keep functioning with regular online meetings, but has made significant progress for a new organisation in pursuing our aims. In spite of having to cancel or significantly pause events and activities, we have refocused our efforts and progressed items that didn't require face to face meetings. We maintained contact with our members, produced 2 newsletters, attracted more members and progressed some planned and initiated several new projects:

- Complete redesign and expansion of our website
- Planning a Wildlife Arts festival
- Successful fundraising
- Re-focussed our efforts on rewilding green spaces
- Developed contacts and projects with schools.
- Maintained strong links with other local wildlife groups
- Active engagement on the East of Otley development
- Increased our online presence and following
- Achieved regular local media publicity

In addition, we produced a new constitution and safeguarding policy with a view to applying for charitable status.

By any standards for a new small organisation it has been a remarkable achievement; even more so considering the circumstances. I would like to acknowledge and thank the members of our committee for all their hard work and commitment through this difficult year. We appreciate the support from our members and financial contributions from organisations such as Wharfedale Naturalists Society and individual donations.

We can be proud of our work which is beginning to make a difference, significantly in the amount of extra interest generated in wildlife and its importance for our future.

Whilst we are fearful of the huge potential devastation from the East of Otley housing and road development, we have in Wildlife Friendly Otley an organisation now which has great support to help us act as voice for wildlife.

Andrew McKeon  
Chair  
June 2021



## The committee

Since April 2020 we have seen regular attendance at committee meetings of our 10 committee members, as follows:

<b>Andrew McKeon – Chair</b>	<b>River Six – Secretary</b>	<b>Danielle Hudson – Treasurer</b>
<b>Neil Griffin — Education</b>	<b>Jane — Rewilding</b>	<b>Chris Huby</b>
<b>Claire Colman</b>	<b>Helen Hey</b>	<b>Rebecca Mason</b>
<b>Steve Heaton</b>		

Monthly meetings have taken place, usually the first Wednesday of every month, due to the ongoing COVID pandemic these have taken place virtually using Zoom, with Andrew as the Chair. Regular communication takes place between committee members via email and WhatsApp and this has meant decisions can be fast-tracked where needed.

## Finances

As might be expected during this most unusual of years, income was lower (£1310) compared to the previous year (£3644), though this previous figure was high because of the donation from Lush.

Restrictions due to the pandemic meant many of our fundraising activities were curtailed but just before the third lockdown we held a bumper sale, raffle and tombola at the Buttercross which raised a wonderful £451.

Expenditure was £2431, which included £1565 of the Lush donation for bird tables, books etc for school wildlife makeovers, re-development of the website ([wildlifefriendlyotley.org.uk](http://wildlifefriendlyotley.org.uk)) and bird boxes for wildlife pledge champions.

Other expenditure included wildflower seeds and signs for the re-wilding of the grounds outside the BT Exchange, printing of materials for the wildlife pledge campaign and a banner for use at future events.

In a challenging year for charitable fundraising we have been grateful for the donations we have received: they really do help us to be a voice for Otley's wildlife.

Danny Hudson  
Treasurer  
June 2021



## Membership

Since April 2020 membership has increased from 86 to 100 in March 2021. There has also been a greater expressed interest from members to be more involved, this has led to thinking about working groups led by committee members.

A number of new member zoom meetings have taken place to welcome new members and introduce them to our current projects.

## Social media

During the pandemic, much of our work has focused on raising awareness through social media, this has become an even more important resource to keep in touch with our members and followers. Since our previous annual report, our facebook following has increased by 306%, twitter by 148% and Instagram by 226%. This growth is thanks to new social media campaigns such as 'Seen in Otley.'



574



330



623

## Campaigns and projects

Since April 2021, the country has been in and out of lockdown, many of our ongoing projects therefore have been delayed or had to move online.

### East of Otley Action Group

Local groups, including our own, formed the East of Otley Action Group to hold the developers to account. We are working to ensure that the Otley Neighbourhood Plan is respected along with regional and national commitments to tackle the climate, ecological and inequality crises that we face. If it goes ahead, the East of Otley development will add 550 homes and a relief road to the outskirts of Otley. It is the largest local development for decades and it is of huge importance to all members of the Otley community, and therefore the biggest threat to local wildlife and their habitat.

### Otley Nature Network

On the 30 November 2020, the inaugural meeting of a new project took place. The collaborative project launched with Otley2030, came from their One Planet Living framework, which itself is divided into 10 distinct categories, the Otley Nature Network was created to encompass the 'Land and Nature' and 'Sustainable Water' principles. There are 21 members of the Otley Nature Network, many of which are professional ecologists living and working in Otley. An action plan has

been drafted, detailing what needs to be done to reach a 10% increase in Otley's biodiversity every year for the next 10 years.

## Pledges

Soon after launching our wildlife pledge campaign, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world. The pledge campaign encourages everyone in Otley to do something for wildlife. We have prepared idea sheets for families, individuals, businesses, schools and community groups, which are all available on our website.

All efforts to encourage businesses and community groups to pledge have been postponed.

Through social media, we have continued to encourage individuals and families to pledge, by doing something for wildlife at home and in their own gardens.



## Rewilding Green Spaces

We are working to create wildlife corridors throughout the town in order to enhance and restore our wildflower and insect population, whilst also improving connectivity between habitats. We have successfully liaised with a number of businesses and institutions in Otley, including the hospital, police station, churches and others, to relax mowing on their land and allow the wildlife corridors to flourish.

Although Leeds City Council has continued to resist change and declined to implement relaxed mowing in the town, we continue to

lobby vigorously for this in order to support the Climate Emergency and help our depleted wildlife.

## School wildlife makeovers

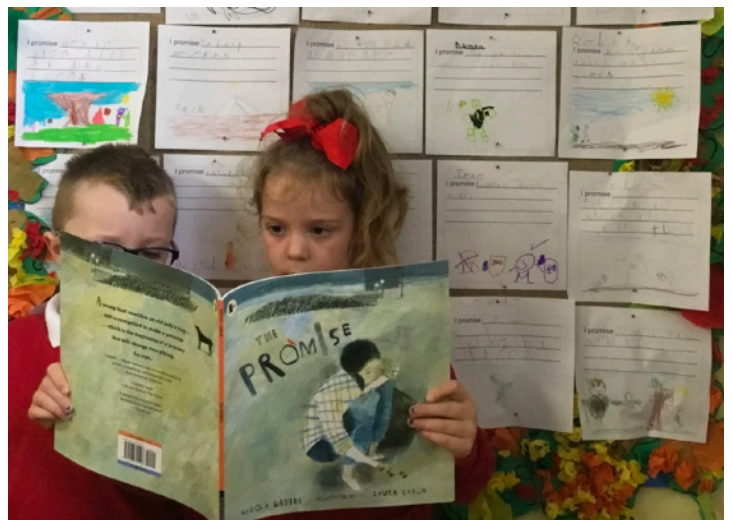
We have now established good relationships with all the Otley schools. Although the lockdowns prevented most on-site work, we have maintained digital communication and had many socially distanced meetings. Otley's primary schools remain keen to improve the biodiversity of their grounds through wildlife make-over days, and want to engage their children with local wildlife. Dates were fixed with schools but had to be postponed. In the meantime, wildlife equipment bought with the Lush grant was delivered to four schools, and we facilitated the planting of trees in



school grounds through the Child Friendly Leeds, TCV and Woodland Trust offers. WFO members helped plant the trees at St Joseph's. We are helping Ashfield re-wild their verge, and Westgate celebrate their 150th birthday with green initiatives. We were also involved in their project around the inspiring re-wilding book *The Promise*.

We have started to work with Prince Henry's, in particular their Ecommittee led by teacher Emma Days. We attended one of their meetings and will work with the group (eg. auditing school grounds habitats) when restrictions lift. PHGS have identified us as partners in the ecological mitigation of the new sports pitch, and are giving consideration to the new GCSE in Natural History.

The Otley Outdoor Adventures project, delivering curriculum-related activities and forest school at Farnley, was due to start with a day for Year 2 at the Whartons, but Covid restrictions led to its postponement. The Town Council would like OOA to also operate out of the Education Room on the Chevin, and a successful meeting to this end was also held with the City Council. The Otley Family of Schools has been approached with a view to their co-designing OOA provision. Several new funding opportunities are being investigated.



## Website

A professional online presence was deemed more important than ever before, this year we were able to launch a brand new website, which now features a kids' area. The site's new look is thanks to Otley-based design and communications agency Yorkshire Wordwright.



### Press coverage

Throughout the pandemic we have endeavoured to maintain a good profile with regular press releases. We have had an article in every issue of Otley Matters which is delivered to every house in Otley. Articles, press releases and letters have been issued on the following subjects:

- Wildlife in Lockdown
- Return of the swifts
- Pledge campaign.
- Go wild for Christmas gifts
- BT Wildflower garden
- Schools wildlife project
- Rewilding campaign
- Look out for Hedgehogs this spring
- Otley East plans will devastate wildlife
- National Nest Box week and Pledge campaign

Coverage has been in the Wharfedale Observer, Bradford Telegraph & Argus, Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post.

### Looking forward

As soon as it is safe to do so, we will be getting out, meeting people at events and gearing up our campaigns.

The committee  
Wildlife Friendly Otley  
June 2021

**Wildlife Friendly Otley thanks the following organisations for their support:**

AMYPANDA



KATE  
BROUGHTON

