

Ryedale Environmental Group (REG) - Restoring Nature Conference – 18 September 2026

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Copies of the power-point presentations which contain much more detail will be available on the REG website.

Introduction by Peter Winter, REG

I have no intelligence of how aware the Environmental Group within the Town Council is of REG or what they can help with and have therefore based this simple report on what I felt would be of immediate interest.

Ryedale Environment Group hosted its third Restoring Nature Conference the primary aim being to help Town and Parish Councils fulfil their increasing obligations to support nature recovery.

New to the remit of REG are the following items:

1 – Preservation of Dark Skies especially with particular emphasis on the Howardian Hills landscape.

2 – Reduction of plastics in the eco system with an introduction to Morsbags.

In 2007 Claire Morsman looked at why it was more expensive to buy a supermarket 'bag for life' or single use plastic bag. This started an initiative to use remnants of material before being placed in textile bins and ultimately landfill to make Morsbags which are given away free. There are over 1500 'pods' (groups who make these bags) and as of September 2025 over 594,655 are now being used worldwide. The bag I received was made by the Pickering Stitchers 'pod' who have made 4,709 bags and counting.

3 – Citizen Science – using local citizen volunteers to conduct sample collecting to help indicate levels of phosphate and nitrogen pollution in local water courses. These are analysed by Yorkshire Water.

AQUA – the collection of 6 samples for testing including for E Coli. From 10 local samples 2 indicated bodies of water which are good enough to swim in leaving 8 which indicated differing levels of contamination.

Using the State of Nature Report to /Achieve 30x30

Alister Fitter, President, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust who was instrumental in the research conducted at Askham Bog.

In a 2024 regional report, rather than national, it was found that 2/3rds of everything in nature in Britain is in Yorkshire. In Yorkshire there are still 45,000 species as some have already been lost but not all. Of these some are increasing against decline; unfortunately, as an example these are such as the common nettle and woodpigeon and those continuing to decline are the rarer species such as Lady Slipper Orchid and Bullfinches! Hotspots of the rarer species have been identified and these need to be carefully managed. Wetlands are also very important and Ryedale has sustained a serious loss of this habitat and as a consequence the wildlife that needs it to survive.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust are working on a project – 30x30 - to bring wildlife back 30% by 2030 and it has been shown it can be done by it in incremental steps:

1. Improve protected areas. Not as historically done – ‘just leave it be’ as this has shown nature can still decline in those areas. Uplands account for 11% of Yorkshire of which 15% is in ‘bad’ condition so there needs to be improvement here.
2. Other protected reserves are being added; some managed very well but these are scattered and some not managed at all. There needs to be an increase in protected areas to save species which are under threat.
3. Revitalise landscapes to be wildlife aware.
4. New water management landscapes. These of course need agricultural support. Large Estates are re-wilding and expressions of interests are increasing.
5. Most important is the reconnecting of sites. Half of rivers have undergone physical change and not just in urban areas such as with the introduction of drainage channels and tunnels etc., and this needs to be reversed to reintroduce flood plains and wetlands which connect to each other. The lack of connectivity has seen the failure of some nature reserves.

All the above will enable us to maintain what we have and encourage the increase of rare species under threat. To achieve this working together, individuals and not just organisations, needs to be encouraged. There is also a need to break out of the straightjacket of thinking wildlife conservation only applies to rural areas and be encouraged to include urban areas which are very important in the linking of biodiversity. The amount of work this will require should not be taken lightly.

Hedgerows and Wildlife Corridors

Holly Ramsden, Project Officer (Grubs Up!), North Yorks National Park Authority

Following on from the above Holly emphasised the importance of 'B' corridors, not as in bees, although they do serve the purpose of allowing bees and pollinating insects to move around, but wider biodiversity corridors for all wildlife to be connected. Roadside verges are a good example as they tend to be less disturbed but are nitrogen enriched due to traffic, and you can see the blue 'grubs up' plaques along the A170.

Creation of ponds, and encouragement for these to be not too far apart allowing for amphibians to travel to different sites.

Collective connection. Community orchards and church graveyards enhancing the grass under the trees. Connecting these with hedgerows helps with migration and pollination.

Request local expressions of interest of land where scrub clearance; bracken bashing can be undertaken to encourage diversification of wildlife, maybe even digging a pond.

Create local plant nurseries to collect seeds to increase species conservation.

Helping Ponds and Waterways

Dr Laurence Jarvis, Global Amphibians

Dr Laurence was involved in the Monks Cross development where there was a huge population of newts. The addition of tunnels under the roads allows the migration of frogs and newts etc around the site and connects the various new and already established ponds in the area.

Again the emphasis was on the creation of ponds and vital wildlife corridors to sustain the native amphibians which in Yorkshire include the common frog, toads and newts. These range from ponds, puddles and scrapes for frogs who only need water in which to breed and are not too choosy nor bothered about the presence of small numbers of fish, and deeper, larger more permanent ponds preferably fish free in undisturbed areas for toads, who are in decline because of loss of habitat, and newts. Strensall Common was cited as having a very good population of toads because of undisturbed wildlife corridors in that area.

Nature Friendly Village & Towns

Mike Hawtin, Head of Nature Recovery, North York Moors National Park

Authority

Mike talked about limited funding which means nature recovery initiatives have to be targeted and the work has to continue when the funding stops. It is not trying to change the whole area but finding even small opportunities in villages such as those identified in the other presentations – doing things with and not to – perfection being the enemy of preservation!

Nature friendly villages also have an obligation to reduce light pollution; working as far as possible towards dark skies not just for stargazing but to conserve the habitat for wildlife active at night. Everyone can contribute and these easy messages need to be spread around our local areas:

Switch off when not necessary – not asking for people not to have garden lighting or security lighting but switch off when not needed and adopt wildlife friendly security lighting in necessary locations. Also saves on energy usage.

Close Curtains – it is incredible how much light pollution is caused by people leaving their curtains open. Also helps with the insulation of your home helping with reduction in energy consumption.

Warm white rather than white/daylight lamps. A study found that in an area of white light the amount of hedgerow wildlife fell by 80%. Warm light is better as the percentage was 50% but obviously no light is best of all.

There were various stalls at the Conference all of which were very interesting. One in particular I thought might be of interest and that was the UK Squirrel Accord – Join the grey squirrel tree damage survey. Helping to gather evidence of grey squirrel bark stripping to raise awareness and increase protection. Helping to maintain health trees and woods for the future. Simon Roxbee UKSA Project Officer is quite happy to talk to the Town Council and offer help in taking action to reduce the negative impact of grey squirrels on our woodlands.