

Backies News

NEWSLETTER FROM THE FRIENDS OF CLIFTON BACKIES

Spring Wildlife at Clifton Backies by Vanessa Grant



Spring is here and the Backies are coming to life again! The blackthorn blossom is at its best right now (see photo above). It will soon be followed by the hawthorn (May) blossom.

Tony has seen the elusive water vole near the bridge onto Bootham Stray – in the area where we've done bank clearance work. Hopefully we'll get some baby water voles this Spring!

Recent sightings

The butterflies and birds are also returning – Tony is doing his 3rd butterfly survey and has already seen Peacocks, Commas, Brimstones, Small Tortoiseshells, Green-Veined Whites, Small Whites, Speckled Woods, Orange Tips (see picture above) and Holly Blues. Not bad so early in the year!

And finally – a moorhen has chosen an old pushchair in the balancing pond for its nest (see photo below) in which a clutch of eggs was laid. More about this in latest news.

The chiffchaffs have returned from their annual migration and can be heard and seen now.



Vanessa also spotted a rare black redstart (see photo) which must have been passing through on its migration route as they aren't normally found in this area.



Pushchair nest photo by Lesley Booth
Blackthorn & Orange Tip by Tony Fairburn

Upcoming events

- 30th May at 10am - **Work day** - Positioning the posts for the trail (see latest news). Please help us put Backies on the map! Meet at Sutton Way entrance.
- 13th June - **Dragonfly Talk and Walk** with Dragonfly expert Keith Gittens - Meet 9:45am at Woodland Chase to travel to the talk at Rawcliffe Country Park. Then return to Backies to meet for walk from 12:30pm. Booking is essential.
- 1st August at 1:30pm - **Butterfly Walk** with Tony - We will be hoping to see plenty of the 23 species for the Big butterfly count!
- 29th August at 8:30pm - **Bat Night** with Clair Suddaby - Please wear sturdy footwear and bring a torch. Booking is essential.
- 11th September at 7:30pm - **Moth Night** with Tony - Please wear sturdy footwear and bring a torch. Booking is essential.

Meet at Woodland Chase car park unless otherwise stated, further details on our website. All events are free to members and a small charge for non-members. Book by email: antony.fairburn@gmail.com or by phone: 07714307709.

Latest News

Litter – and moorhens!

Lesley was concerned about items that had been dumped in the balancing pond. She rang City of York Council's customer services number (551551) and was very impressed when a team turned up within 90 minutes to deal with the problem. However they discovered the moorhen's nest in the pushchair and said they'd come back when the mother has vacated - Latest (sad) news is that the nest is empty and the main suspect is a gull which was seen hanging around.

If anyone spots fly-tipping on the Backies please ring the Council on the number above. They will usually come out within a day or two.

Big Spring Clean – several members took part in the Council's city-wide Big Spring Clean at the end of March. Between us we collected a dozen big refuse sacks of rubbish in 2 hours – a good afternoon's work! Thanks again to all who helped out.

Continued...

The Doug Heald Trail

In February, Doug Heald, one of our long-standing members, passed away. Some of you will remember that it was only last September that Doug led an 'art walk' on the Backies for us, which was very much enjoyed.

In our last newsletter we reproduced an interview with Doug from *The Changing Face of Clifton* in which he spoke about his childhood memories of playing on the Backies, which began his lifelong interest in wildlife and flowers. Doug was still a very regular visitor to the Backies and frequently did litter-picking while he was there.

We were very sorry to hear of Doug's death and he will be greatly missed. His funeral collection was very kindly donated to the Friends of Clifton Backies by his family and it will, of course, be put to good use. We are currently in contact with his family and are looking into providing a bench and/or planting a tree in his memory.

In the meantime, we have received some Ward funding from City of York Council to create a waymarked nature trail around the Backies. It will have numbered markers at points of natural and historical interest and a map of the trail will be on the Friends web-site. The committee has decided to name it the Doug Heald Trail in his honour. Doug's partner, Carole, has said he would be proud and delighted to know a trail on the Backies was going to be dedicated to him. We feel it's a fitting tribute to Doug's long association with, and love of, the Backies.

Our next meeting will be held on Monday 6th July and will take place on the Backies. Meet in the Woodland Chase car park at 7.30.

Also

If you have any ideas for events, information or sightings you would like to report for Clifton Backies, please pass them to Vanessa (Vanessagrants@aol.com) or Tony Fairburn (antony.fairburn@gmail.com or 07714307709). We would be delighted to include them on our website or in our newsletter.

Please tell everyone about the great things we have planned at Clifton Backies and pass on a membership form - we always like to see new faces at meetings and events.

For further information regarding the Friends please see the Clifton Backies web pages : www.cliftonbackies.org.uk.