



Darlington & Teesdale Naturalists' Field Club

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Founded 1891

Registered Charity No: 510783

Website:- www.dtnfc.org

Annual Subscription

Ordinary member £15.00

Full time student £1.00

Cover photograph courtesy of Falgunee Sarker

Common Spotted-orchid

Dactylorhiza fuchsii

Officers and Council 2023

President	Steve Gater
President Elect	Carol Sobkowiak
General Secretary	Sue Weston
Membership Secretary	Fleur Miles
Treasurer	Martin Chisholm
Summer Programme	Derek Risbey
Winter Programme	John Turner/Steve Gater
Editor	Lynne Heslop

Section Organisers

Archaeology	Steve Keeney
Botany	David Selby
Geology	Susan Hepworth
Lepidoptera	Fleur Miles
Mammals	Ian Bond
Marine Biology	Carole Sobkowiak
Mycology	Jill Cunningham
Ornithology	John Turner
Projects	Carole Sobkowiak

Other Members of Council

Mary Atkinson, Barry Chapman, Falgunee Sarker

Other Organisations

AES
British Pteridological Society
BSBI
Durham Wildlife Trust
YNU
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

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President's Report - Steve Gater

In many ways 2023 has been a mixed year with many unsettling things happening across the world and challenges to daily lives that include hikes in living costs, energy charges and more. So the chance to forget such issues on hikes into the countryside and neighbouring locations has brought delight and refreshing distraction. We are so fortunate to have such an amazing wealth of natural history on our doorstep to discover and enjoy. But not to take for granted! Thankfully Carole, Elizabeth, Michael and Angela have given amazing energy and insight into the preservation of the Parkland at Blackwell.

And the loss of Dr Elizabeth Elliot at the start of the year was difficult, yet allowed reflection upon her huge input into our activities and achievements.

Over the year I have continued to be impressed by, and grateful for, the wealth of interest, experience and expertise that all members of our club have and share so willingly. Some members are conspicuously active, others less so – and everyone is an important part of our club.

By belonging to Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists' Field Club you contribute to its objectives which I remind you of here; they are the

1. study of all branches of Natural History, Geology and Archaeology
2. collection of information concerning the topography, field paths and natural archaeological features of the Darlington district and Teesdale including the compilation of lists of the recent and fossil fauna and flora
3. preservation of the characteristic plants and animals of the district and their habitats
4. dissemination of information to other interested organisations and the general public
5. further education of members and the general public in all aspects of Natural History

That's an impressive list of things to do and, as President, I can look back and say 'yes, we've done an awful lot of those things this year, and done them very well!'

I hope that you agree. I hope that you have enjoyed planning, organising, running or enjoying the different activities this year. I also hope that you accept my sincere appreciation of everything that you have done towards these mighty objectives.

As members are aware, Council meets regularly to discuss and plan club activities for the benefit of all. Officers and section leaders put in a great deal of time and effort to keep the club running smoothly, to attend to the interests of all members as well as they are known, to attract new members and to engage the wider public. The programme for 2024 looks to build on this year's successes, to offer new opportunities, to celebrate our wonderful natural history. So take part in what you can, share and enjoy!

General Secretary - Sue Weston

I always find it difficult knowing where to start this report and of course January is the answer. 2023 has been more challenging for me as secretary due to my personal commitments as I have been unable to attend Winter Meetings and only a few of the Summer ones – so apologies as my news was not so 'hands on' this year.

The New Year Plant Hunt for the BSBI started the year and members were forwarded with details.

The January Newsletter stated the start of the 2023 Winter Programme talks at the Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College on 11 January.

Dr Elizabeth Elliott was a great loss to the club in early 2023 and her funeral was held in early February. Carole Sobkowiak wrote a splendid eulogy that was very interesting and a lovely tribute to Elizabeth, this was placed in the monthly newsletter.

The Club made representation at the 'Volunteer Fair' held in the Dolphin Centre that was arranged by Darlington Borough Council early in the year.

The Annual Report was available for the AGM Meeting in March.

The Summer Programme commenced in late March with the usual Yellow Star of Bethlehem recording walk.

During the year a 'Well-Being day', a 'Make a difference Day' and the "Freshers Fair" were held at the Queen Elizabeth College where club members attended with a display of the Club's activities.

Brian Wood retired from the Membership Secretary role that was taken over by Fleur Miles.

In June a number of members represented the club at a BIO Diversity Fair in Barnard Castle.

The Summer Programme continued successfully during the Summer months. June was particularly good for the weather although this did change as we moved on into July. Reports for the outings are now available on the Club's website from the monthly newsletters. <https://dtnfc.org>

Cliff Evans who had also been a very active and key member of the club and Council for many years passed away and a number of members attended his funeral. As they did too for Jean Taylor who also passed away later in the year.

A number of Council Members represented the Club at the Annual BSBI Conference that was held at Newcastle University in early December.

Twenty-two members enjoyed a Christmas meal at The Spotted Dog in December.

I would like to thank members for sending reports and information for the monthly newsletters during the past year.

Council Meetings were held in January, April, July and November during the year where club business was discussed and cascaded to members. I would like to also thank Council Members for assisting with the running and minute taking in meetings during my absence earlier in the year.

Membership Secretary - Fleur Miles

I resumed being Membership Secretary at the March 2022 AGM, so this is my second year in post from that date.

Last year Membership stood at a total of 66, that was 61 Ordinary Members, 4 Honorary Members and 1 Life Member in January 2023. After that date, 6 more Ordinary Members left between February 2023 and March 2023, taking the total of Ordinary Members down from 61 to 55 Members at 15 March 2023.

This year at 10 February 2024, the Membership Total is 56 Members. That is 52 Ordinary Members, 3 Honorary Members, and 1 Life Member. During the recent Membership Renewals drive from October 2023 to February 2024, 5 Ordinary Members decided to leave due to mobility, ill health, or work commitment reasons, and 1 Honorary Member passed away. However, we welcomed 3 new Members between November 2023 and January 2024. As at 10 February 2024, we have not heard from 4 Ordinary Members nor a potential new Member. We await their decisions as to whether to continue with the Club or leave the Club, or join the Club for the first time, respectively.

Sadly, former Member and keen botanist Jean Taylor, aged 85, passed away on 6 August 2023. 6 Members attended her funeral on 25 August. We also sadly lost Honorary Member and former Lepidoptera Section Organiser Cliff Llewellyn Evans, aged 91, who passed away on 21 August 2023. 11 people represented the Field Club at the celebration of Cliff's life on 21 September. It was a most uplifting event.

I would like to thank Field Club Council Members who are currently discussing recruitment drive ideas. I would also like to thank Sue Weston, Martin Chisholm and Brian Wood for their continued assistance during this - my fifth year - as Membership Secretary as from 2018 when I first took on this role."

Treasurer - Martin Chisholm

The accounts are prepared on the receipts and payments method and are for the financial year ending 31 December 2023. Overall, the accounts show a profit on paper of £589.02 compared to a loss of £172.28 in 2022.

Savings were made on printing the annual report due to digital production only, and on liability insurance and the non-renewal of the related Ramblers membership. In addition, costs for the website have been deferred to next year.

Despite returning to face-to-face meetings, there were no speakers expenses. Thank you to members for providing talks and for the generosity of outside speakers in not charging expenses. The club ran no Sponsorship activities during the year thus no exceptional items.

The Operational Income for 2024 should be similar to 2023 with a forecast to roughly break even. Sponsorship activity is expected to return in 2024 with a forecast to continue the World Around Us photo competition at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and a series of Family Events. As previous years, sponsorship activity will be funded from reserves.

The Club's reserves policy aims to ensure one year's running costs are covered and remains at a conservative £5000. This amount is now held in the Business Premium account in order to gain a small amount of interest and to more easily identify the reserve. The balance remains healthy for use to support the aims and objectives of the Club. Council has approved Sponsorship projects and activities to encourage the involvement of children and families in natural history. The surplus of the Balance over Reserves easily covers any likely expenditure in 2024, including forecast sponsorship activity.

The Accounts have been independently audited, with no issues. Thanks again to Ian Hart for his continued contribution to the audit process.

DARLINGTON AND TEESDALE NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB						
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2023						
INCOME	2023	2022	EXPENDITURE	2023	2022	
	£	£		£	£	
Annual subscriptions	780.00	833.00	Room Rental	120.00	110.39	
Entrance donations	265.00	271.00	Subscriptions	144.00	255.50	
Donations	-	20.00	BSBI		39.00	
Field trip fares	-	602.00	AES		20.00	
Events donations	592.00	-	YNU		30.00	
Income tax refund	-	475.67	Durham WLT		30.00	
Interest and Transfers	48.02	4.87	Yorkshire WLT		-	
			Ramblers		-	
			British Pteridological Society		25.00	
			Printing	77.00	148.25	
			Annual Report			
			Programmes & Publicity	77.00		
			Administrative Costs		5.99	
			Website		500.00	
			Insurance	157.00	246.34	
			Equipment	6.00	510.35	
TOTAL INCOME	1,685.02	2,206.54	Social events expenses	592.00		
Profit/Loss on year	-589.02	172.28	Field Trip expenses		602.00	
	1,096.00	2,378.82		1,096.00	2,378.82	
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2023						
Balance at 1st January 2023			Balance at 31st December 2023			
	£			£		
Cash in hand	26.02		Cash in hand	3.02		
Barclays Current A/C	6,408.72		Barclays Current A/C	6,972.72		
Business A/C	5,044.88		Business A/C	5,092.90		
	11,479.62			12,068.64		
			Cheques not yet drawn			
Profit/loss	589.02					
Income & Expenditure A/C						
	12,068.64			12,068.64		

Summer Programme - Derek Risbey

March 2023

26th Low Coniscliffe - Fal Sarker

April 2023

15th Eggleston Abbey - Derek Risbey

25th Blackwell - Barry Chapman

May

9th South Burden Woodland - Jill Cunningham

13th Killhope - Susan Hepworth

16th Gainford South - Lynne Heslop

21st Saltburn with Jo Scott - Carole Sobkowiak

23rd Farm Botany Survey - Steve Gater

27th YNU Ripon Hell Wath - Derek Risbey

30th The Whinnies - Sue Weston

June

6th Mickelton Railway - Brian Wood

10th Hurworth Burn Reservoir - Mary Atkinson

13th Low Barnes - Vince Robertson

18th Muker - Carole Sobkowiak

20th Northumberlandia - S & R Colley

24th YNU Swinton Estate - Steve Gater

27th Crowtree Quarrington Hill - Steve Keeney

July

4th Brignal Banks - Derek Risbey

8th Slitt Wood - Steve Gater

11th Billingham Beck - Ian Bond

15th Rubus Recording - David Earl BSBI

18th Flatts Wood - Brian Wood

22nd St. John's Chapel Geotrail - Susan Hepworth

25th Bishop Middleham Quarry - David Selby

29th Upper Teesdale - Steve Gater

August

29th Bat Watch Croft - Ian Bond

September

2nd Harmby to Spennithorp - Fleur Miles

5th Indoor Meeting Croft Village Hall

12th Whitby Museum - Christine Kroebe

19th Teesmouth - John Barker

23rd Fungus Foray - Jill Cunningham

Winter Programme - John Turner/Steve Gater

January

18th Shining a light on Botany - Derek & Isabella Risbey

25th British Rain Forests - Keith Gunning

February

1st Remembering St Hilda in the late middle ages - Christine Krobek

8th Members favourite photos

15th DigVentures Local Archeology Projects - Lisa Westcott Williams

March

1st The BrightWater Project and its Legacy - Paul Black

8th Plants on the Edge - Geoff Herbert

15th AGM followed by Biomimicry - Martin Chisholm

29th President's Talk - Steve Gater

November

8th ERIC Survey & Recording - Paul Stevens

22nd Uzbekistan - David Selby

December

6th Christmas Lunch at the Spotted Dog

13th Every Picture Tells a Story - Members' Photos

Editor - Lynne Heslop

Thank you to all the Council members and Section Organisers/Leaders who have submitted their reports, due to unforeseen circumstances we are unable to provide Geology and Ornithology reports this year.

Many thanks also to all members of the club who have contributed both formally and informally. All contributions are very welcome and make for another interesting and informative Annual Report.

Section Organisers' Reports

Archeology - Steve Keeney

I feel very honoured to be the current Archaeology Section Leader and would like to take this opportunity to appreciate the legacy of a couple of my predecessors.

I joined the Field Club, attracted by the summer outings and weekly winter talks. My interests were always centred around local history and archaeology but I wanted to learn a little more about the natural world. When I joined, Win Woodhouse was the archaeology section leader and she was a great source of information and enthusiasm, ensuring that items of archaeological interest were always represented in the summer and winter programme.

As section leader I was asked to give a talk in the winter programme this year and used the records left to the Club by Alistair Campbell Dixon, Archaeology Section Leader and Past President 1907-1910. To highlight and commemorate a lecture he gave to Club members on "St Godric and Finchale Priory" incorporating his original hand drawn site map, sketches and photos of the Priory.

Born in Thirsk in 1845 to Quaker parents; Alistair did not know his birth date as birthdays were not celebrated by the Society of Friends. I have looked at 1911 Census and Electoral Roll information and other documentation from when he lived at 12 Kendrew Street and Alistair always explains he only knows the year of his birth.

From 1882 after he and many of his generation campaigned, the great collection of historic buildings and monuments now in the care of English Heritage began to be amassed. At that stage heritage was the responsibility of The Office of Works, the government department responsible for architecture and buildings.

Alistair died on the 2nd November 1913 and is buried in the Friends cemetery garden in Skinnergate. Alistair lived just long enough to celebrate the Act of Parliament in 1913 that gave the Office new powers to make a collection of the greatest sites and buildings that told the story of Britain. Alistair would be very happy to know the collection of historic places now managed by what is now English Heritage has grown to over 400. English Heritage's declared mission is:- "Inspired by a determination to put England's Heritage ahead of private interests"

We are so lucky that people like Alistair and many of his enlightened generation campaigned and acted to successfully preserve our natural and historic heritage.

So we can now arrange and enjoy visiting and learning about so many well preserved and maintained historic places. As well as recording the flora and fauna in habitats recognised and cared for within protected landscapes and nature reserves.

It is also good to know that the Club continues to campaign and act to ensure that local plans are scrutinised and mitigation measures adopted or planning refused to protect areas of environmental or historic value.

Botany - David Selby

This year there were about 30 events planned, mostly with an opportunity to record our botanical finds.

The Botany Section was well represented on most outings and reports have been produced already so this report summarises some of the highlights.

Once again, a number of members took part in the New Year Plant Hunt, organised by the BSBI. In comparison with last year (2022) plants in flower were hard to come by and recordings were very low. This was not just locally but reflected across the country.

On the various outings, botanical highlights (less common plants) included:

- A stand-out visit was to Baker's farm near Esh Winning to carry out a botanical survey in May. The fields were full of flowers and the stand-out find was of a Changing Forget-Me-Not, *Myosotis discolor*.
- We must also mention because it is so rare, the shy retiring yellow Wild Tulip, *Tulipa sylvestris* found at Blackwell in May.
- Meanwhile, the Teesdale Ladies Mantle, *Alchemilla acutiloba*, was found by the old Teesdale railway near Mickleton, also in May. This plant was only discovered in 1946 and is now only found in Teesdale.

- Not rare but very out-of-place was a single Harebell, *Campanula rotundifolia* (and some Bladder campion, *Silene vulgaris*) in the river stones at Gainford in May
- Also remarkable was a lot of Toothwort, *Lathraea squamaria*, at Thorsgill Wood near Egglestone Abbey in May. Toothwort is one of the unusual family of Broomrapes, Orobanche, which are perennial, parasitic, leafless plants with no green pigment, growing on the roots of other plants, often but not exclusively on Hazel.
- On the YNU outing to Nutwith Common Woods in June, the highlight was a find of Field Garlic, *Allium oleraceum*. This was highlighted in the YNU magazine, The Naturalist, in December 2023 where you can find more information.
- Closer to home, also less usual was a find of Crow Garlic, *Allium vineale*, on our Billingham Beck outing in July
- Finally, on our visit to Bishop Middleham Quarry in July we found the very rare and so elegant Dark Red Helleborine, *Epipactis atrorubens*, along with very many Fragrant Orchids, *Gymnadenia conopsea*.



Lepidoptera - Fleur Miles

"Following in the footsteps of Cliff Evans and Brian Wood, I became the Lepidoptera Section Organiser at the 15 March 2023 AGM.

I have experienced two great moments with butterflies in my 63 years. My first great butterfly moment was before I became a teenager. I lived with my family in Cheadle in Cheshire where our house backed onto Ladybrook Valley or former farm land called Higher Mill Wood - with the Micker Brook flowing through it. A Great Sea Kale plant grew in our back garden. Its leaves are cabbage-like and it has a huge tall froth of tiny white flowers which smell like honey. One year it became inundated with the caterpillars of a white butterfly - we called them Cabbage Whites in the 1960s/1970s. In my bedroom, I cleared some space in a white painted bookcase with sliding glass doors and moved some of the caterpillars in there and provided them with their food plant leaves and twigs to rest on. I had the privilege of watching them turn from caterpillar into chrysalis and finally into butterfly. I learnt how important it was for the butterfly to get pumping fluid into its wings as soon as possible and be able to hang upside down, with no obstacles in the way, so it could straighten out its wings during the pumping process. It would be going nowhere if the wings remained crumpled. The butterflies were released once they were ready to fly. I imagine I was supervised in all of this by my Mother who is the other naturalist in the family.

My second great butterfly moment occurred on approximately 6 June 2017. I remember attending a sunny afternoon walk led by Cliff Evans at Red Hall Local Nature Reserve in Darlington. We happened to visit on a day when it was an emergence of Common Blue butterflies. It was a lovely sight to behold. Other Members remember this event too.

The Butterfly Conservation headlines make grim reading: we have lost 98% of our flower meadows and butterflies have declined by 80% both in abundance and distribution. People born in 1976 will probably be the last generation to see butterflies in abundance.

According to the INCA publication "Wild Teesside" printed in 2019, UK Lepidoptera consists of 60 species of butterfly and 2,500 moth species. Of the national total, 38 butterfly species and 1,738 moth species have been recorded in nearby Yorkshire. 26 butterfly species and 500 moth species have been recorded in Teesside brownfield sites. North East England (Northumberland, Durham and Teesside) has 34 butterfly species (according to Butterfly Conservation).

I noticed from my photographs that we had late snow on 10 March 2023 yet magically the butterflies appeared on cue on 4 April 2023.

The North East has a great variety of habitats: upland moorland, broad-leaved and coniferous woodland, farmland, coastal dunes and former quarries. As we visit many locations spread over Weardale, Teesdale, Durham, Teesside, and Yorkshire, and have many pairs of eyes to make observations, from my notes and photographs, we have found at least 18 species of the 34 species you can expect to find in North East England. We managed to spot the Northern Brown Argus (a UK Priority Species) and Small Heath (a UK Priority Species Research Only) both at Bishop Middleham. I managed to spot one UK Priority Species but in France - the Dingy Skipper - and a UK Priority Species Research Only but in France - the Wall Brown. We managed to spot Peacock caterpillars (Brignall Banks) and Comma caterpillar at Gainford. Nutwith Common, Brignall Banks, Coatham Wood, Bishop Middleham and the scabious planted southern slopes of Footy Dene in the Brinkburn Denes seemed to be the best places for Lepidoptera in 2023.

We managed to spot at least 25 species of moths. We found Cinnabar caterpillars at Quarrington. We spotted evidence of larva leaf mine of Micromoth *Formoria septembrella* at Brignall Banks. For me the highlight moth was the Pale Tussock we found at Nutwith Common near Swinton Estate, Grewelthorpe. My list of moth species only covers one micromoth. Jill Cunningham will have found a lot more than that. The best moth story for me is regards to the *Agapeta hamana*. This is known variously as the Common Yellow Conch, Garden Straw or Hook-marked Straw Moth. Well it has gained two new nicknames within DTNFC. Jill Cunningham's name for this moth is Smiley Moth because its markings look exactly like a Smiley emoji when seen from above. Ian Bond's name for this moth is Janet's Moth as his partner was wowed by the moth when she saw it for the first time at High Coniscliffe.

Regarding other invertebrates, one of the highlights for me was the Water Stick Insect found at Cleasby fishermen's pond. We found Shield Bug eggs and empty Dragonfly cases at Nutwith Common. I still find those ancient ant hills at Brignall Banks an amazing sight. Also finding 8 number 22 spot yellow ladybirds on a single Greater Burnet plant at Harmby was impressive too. I seemed to photograph insects from 9 April at Snipe Pond to 30 October when a lacewing landed on my front window outside.

I would like to thank Members for sending me their photographs and observations of butterflies, moths and other invertebrates they have spotted on their own personal walks and for keeping me in the loop when I was unable to attend some of the walks."

Common Yellow Conch Moth



Brown Plume Moth

Barred Fruit Tree Tortrix



Pale Tussock Moth

Mammals and Herptiles - Ian Bond

It's probably fair to say that 2023 was a case of quality over quantity when it came to records of mammals, reptiles and amphibians. My mammal year could hardly have started any better. On what has become our New Year's Day pilgrimage to Saltholme, we watched a large Water Vole, its head stuck out of its burrow, nibbling grass, just a yard or two in front of us through the Wildlife Watchpoint window. This was the first time I had seen the animal itself anywhere in the North East since 2005. Unfortunately the couple of Water Vole surveys that I did in Darlington later in the year only further evidenced the species' absence from the borough.

Sadly, the majority of my mammal records each year are road kill but this can produce some novel records. Malcolm Chisholm told me of a badger he found on the A67 before the Middleton St George turn off. While badgers appear to be quite common along the Tees I have never heard of one in that location before or know of anywhere around there that they are found. This might simply just be an indication of how far they wander, as might the one that I saw on the A66 opposite Sadberge. Somewhat further up Teesdale, a dead badger on the Moor Road, west of Staindrop, also seemed to be a long way from anywhere that looked it might harbour a sett. Another unusual road kill was hare on the outskirts of Great Burdon. Had it managed another 100m it would have been an urban hare.

Speaking of unusual urban wildlife, it doesn't get much more unusual than the Roe Deer that Jill Cunningham surprised in West Cemetery, though I dare say the Roe surprised Jill more. As far as I am aware the only way into West Cemetery, even for a Roe Deer, is through the Carmel Road entrance, so that is quite a feat for the deer to find itself there.

A very pleasant surprise for me was the rediscovery of Natterer's bats at St Mary's Church in Long Newton. I used to count them for the National Bat Monitoring Programme until about 20 years ago after which they seemed to have disappeared. I contacted the church this year to see if the bat group could count the Pipistrelle roost that is also there and they reported that bats were still flying inside the church throughout the year, which is not what I would expect from Pipistrelles. Anyway, we set up with an infra-red camera to watch where we thought the bats entered the church, judging by the number of droppings on the pulpit, and counted 67 Natterer's bats warming up in the nave before going out for the night.

The Field Club's bat walk this year at Croft Bridge was a little less successful. We didn't get Noctule, let alone the wished for Leisler's (though Leisler's would be so unusual that it would have had to have been one of your three wishes; just any old wish would not have done it). Nor could we tell if Daubenton's were still coming out of a roost under the bridge, as the circumstances there are such that it would take infra-red or thermal optics to determine that. However they might well have been, as we watched several of them feeding a couple of hundred metres upstream. Daubenton's seem to have had a good year. My annual transect survey of them along the Skerne through South Park was one of the highest counts to date and there were still good numbers of them over the South Park lake on the bat walks that I did this year. I think my only other notable mammal records this year, at least in the Field Club's area, relate to rabbits. A young rabbit on the A66 road verge in March must have been born in early February at the latest, which seems very early. Despite the ravages of the new form of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease, it seems that they are still common in parts of Teesdale but perhaps even more so in Weardale. As I drove over the moor from Bollihope there was a bit of rabbit road kill every 100-200m. Then as soon as the sign said "Welcome to Teesdale", they stopped. I don't know if that's because drivers automatically become more careful once they are in Teesdale, or whether rabbits aren't allowed to cross the district border.

The cold-blooded contingent also produced some very interesting records. Although Richard Taylor Manson listed all four common species of British reptile as being present in Darlington, none are known here today. In fact there are no recent records of Slow Worm in County Durham between the coast and the Pennine fringes and only a handful of Common Lizard records in between. Three posts on the Teesdale Wildlife Sightings Facebook page; a Common Lizard on the allotments at Bowes; a Slow Worm at Eggleston and a Common Lizard at High Lands north of Cockfield Fell, were therefore of great interest as they were right on the eastern boundary of the respective lizards known distribution. Finally, close to home (well at home actually) having got rid of our garden pond now that our granddaughter can run faster than my wife, I expected that I had definitely seen the last of the Alpine Newts that usually I see just one of in most years. Yet despite my only water feature being a tiny tray in the rockery, I actually saw two of them this year. Both were females so I expect the line of succession will stop sometime soon.

Marine Biology - Carole Sobkowiak

Seven members and one grandchild joined the Cleveland Naturalists' for a visit to Saltburn on 21st May. We were fortunate to have Jo Scott with us again as we always learn so much from her.

We arrived at low tide and then made our way back up the beach looking at the rock pools. There were some significant changes this year as compared to previous years when we have done joint visits. These changes were due to the devastation that has taken place on the east coast where thousands of crabs have died. The results of our findings show that there were vast numbers of brittle stars because there were no crabs to eat them. Also noted were large numbers of bootlace worms, starfish and sea urchins that are usually much further out to sea.

There is now much concern about pollution in our seas and there have been recent reports about hermit crabs that are using plastic as shells rather than molluscs. The chemicals that leach out of plastic are known to attract the crabs as they resemble the odour of food. Unfortunately some of the hermit crabs are getting into plastic bottles and are dying. Scientists are now investigating how these pollutants may impact upon the environment.

It is estimated that over 1 million marine animals are killed each year due to plastic debris and that there are 100 million tons in the oceans around the world. By 2050 there could be more plastic in the sea than fish.



Asturias rubens

Mycology - Jill Cunningham

Fungi recorded at field meets early in the year included *taphrina padi*, deforming the fruits of Bird Cherry, at Low Barnes and the tiny orange, edge fringed discs of Common Eyelash Fungus, *scutellinia scutellata* at Hazlet Farm. Two highlights were the rust, *uromyces junci*, found on Jointed Rush at Brignall in July and *leptotrochila prunellae*, minute inky radiating stars, on Selfheal leaves at Deepdale in early February. Both verified on iRecord by Chris Yeates, a well-known Mycologist and lead for the YNU and noted that these are very rarely recorded species, the latter is only known from 20 sites in the UK. (Although the area is now in Durham, records are put in the old Vice Counties, and this would be VC65, NW Yorkshire.) Chris has given me help and advice with many Yorkshire records in recent years and it is with sadness that I mention his passing this year.

Family commitments and poor weather lead to the Autumn Fungus Foray being cancelled and there have been few records or photos to ID from members. The most notable being Devil's Fingers, *clathrus archeri*, with its, (rather smelly), red starfish-like 'tentacles' opening in grassland, seen in the Cheviots by Susan Hepworth.

Ramularia calthae, a leaf spot on Marsh Marigold, was identified from the Slit Gill meet in July and Blue Roundheads, *stropharia caerulea*, were seen under a conifer at West Cemetery in October. In December at Preston Park, I nearly dismissed some little fungal fans on dead twigs of Poplar as common Oysterlings. Only on plucking one did the smooth underside, lacking gills, tell me otherwise. Research and microscopy proved them to be Poplar Bells, *schizophyllum amplum*, an uncommon species. Further north at Heddon on the Wall the delicate caps of *arrhenia rickenii* popped up on a moss-covered wall top, along with the tiny arcs of *arrhenia spathulata*.

Pocket Plum, *taphrina pruni*, being rampant this year and disfiguring many a Blackthorn fruit. Overall, it was a mixed year for fungi, sometimes too dry and later a wash-out, but when warm and damp they flourished.



Devil's Fingers



Common Eyelash



Blue Roundhead

Poplar Bells



Projects - Carole Sobkowiak

The Club has supported the considerable efforts of Michael and Angela Green to preserve the Blackwell Parkland.

Unfortunately there will be housing development on site 403 known as the Blands Corner Triangle at the bottom of Carmel Road South, however there will be restoration of the rest of the Historic Parkland.

This is a most wonderful achievement and there is a timeline which will include tree planting in the community orchard, pond construction, footpath construction, dog bin installation, grassland seeding and habitat creation.

Michael and Angela have done an incredible job to save this remaining land from being built upon and we are delighted that they have become members of the Club.

Many thanks also to the members who undertook botanical and mycology surveys of the Parkland. These were submitted to Darlington Council with acknowledgement of their significance.

There was a double page article in the Northern Echo on Saturday 22nd January entitled "A treasury of trees" which was written by Chris Lloyd. It gives a brilliant overview of the history of the Parkland and he was helped by Fal Sarker who has been recording the trees. Special reference is made to the rare Dawn Redwood and Giant Fir which Fal has researched. There is also a lovely photograph of her in the newspaper. All of this has given excellent publicity for the Field Club. I have written to Chris Lloyd to thank him and he has replied saying that he will help the Club in the future.

The aim has been to preserve this historic site for the enjoyment of the community.

