

High Batts Nature Reserve

Report of the Trustees 2024-25

Trustees serving for the period April 2024 to March 2025

Peter Bowman
Alwin Knowles
Terence Marsh
Ray O'Donnell

Colin Slator (Chair)
Stuart Ward
Marian Wooding
Stephen Worwood

High Batts Nature Reserve

Charity number 1151676

The Reserve is located off the A6108 between the city of Ripon and the village of North Stainley in North Yorkshire (Grid reference SE 300 764).

The address for all correspondence is:-

The Secretary, Mayfield Farm, Wilsill, Harrogate, HG3 5EB Tel. 01423 714910 or 07849 250077

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Trustees' Report

High Batts has existed since 1973 and has been a constituted body since 1994. In 2014 the organisation was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

The Trustees of High Batts Nature Reserve are responsible for ensuring that the objects of the Charity are achieved. These objects are:-

1. To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation and protection of the physical and natural environment through the promotion of biodiversity in particular by managing High Batts Nature Reserve and assisting with the conservation and protection of other significant environments in the vicinity of High Batts Nature Reserve.
2. To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

We continued to achieve these objects by:-

- managing the Reserve in a way that promotes biodiversity and sustainability;
- offering membership of the organisation to all those interested in our work;
- engaging the public through a website, school visits, group visits and open events;
- offering volunteering opportunities in a range of activities;
- contributing to data collection and research through the recording and reporting of species.

Additionally, through our project "In at the Start" we have extended our work through a partnership with Hanson Aggregates to assist with the maintenance, monitoring and subsequent restoration of a quarrying site currently under extraction adjacent to the Reserve. The aim of the project is the promotion of biodiversity and education, and our leadership of this project is made possible through the specialist knowledge of our members and through the resource of our volunteer teams.

Reserve Management

The Reserve is part of Ripon Parks Site of Special Scientific Interest, and until 2018 was managed in accordance with the agreement with Natural England under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. Although this funding agreement has ended, the general conditions of that agreement are followed in recognition of the SSSI designation of the Reserve; tasks are undertaken to improve the biodiversity value of the site through the maintenance and creation of different habitats and the control of invasive non-native species. In addition to the requirements under the agreement, work on the Reserve involves general upkeep tasks and the provision and maintenance of facilities for members such as access paths, hides and signage.

Work on the Reserve is undertaken by a team of Conservation volunteers led by the Voluntary Reserve Manager assisted by the Voluntary Warden and Assistant Warden, and this team works each Thursday. A small Reserve Management Sub-Group operates to ensure good coordination and communication and this reports to the Trustees. In addition, the full volunteer team meets to exchange information and gain feedback. The Conservation Volunteer team also gives assistance to nearby conservation areas outside the boundaries of the Reserve, by providing and managing bird feeding areas and undertaking other habitat management tasks.

During the year there were 10 Members' Muck-in Mornings when we invited members to come along on Saturday mornings to help with routine annual tasks such as Himalayan Balsam and Bracken control, hay raking and autumn coppicing. As in the previous years, the events were well supported and everyone enjoyed getting involved and learning about the Reserve. We also had 2 visits by volunteers from Open Country – a charity which works to provide opportunity for those with disability to access and work in the countryside. In February 2025, a work group from Natural England joined us on a Thursday volunteer day to learn about and experience our maintenance routine.

Membership

Membership of High Batts is open to anyone interested in the work of the Charity, and membership is offered to individuals and to families. Our membership fees are modest (£11 for individuals, £15 for families and £5 for juniors and students) so as to provide accessibility for all. Membership entitlements include unlimited access to the Reserve for family and friends, regular newsletters and invitations to walks and talks and special events. The Reserve is open during day light hours all year round, apart from occasional one-day closure because of events on adjacent land that could pose a safety hazard for visitors.

Members receive regular email communications about developments on the Reserve, forthcoming events and other relevant information. In addition, a Newsletter is issued 3 times a year providing information on Reserve news, members' services, the work of the trustees, and feedback from events. A website operates for members and the public wanting to know more about our work. During the year we decided to give priority to distributing information to members digitally rather than by hard copy. This allowed us to improve the quality and size of communications, making newsletters more informative and attractive with additional photographs. It also significantly reduced the amount of work involved, and lead to much reduced costs of printing and postage. Hard copies continued to be supplied to those members unable to access digital documents. The Facebook page set up in 2024 and open only to members continued to increase its membership with over 220 members by the end of the year.

Membership of the Reserve increased steadily during the year, largely as a result of the Facebook page, and at the end of the financial year had reached 497, an increase of 53 or 11.9% over the 12 months.

Outreach work

We held an Open Day on 21st July 2024 which was a great success with over 120 visitors despite two competing public events being held nearby on the same day. Over half the visitors who came were not members and 5 families subsequently joined. As usual the day included guided walks of the Reserve, demonstrations of bird ringing and moth trapping, plus small mammals caught during the day; there were also displays about the work of the Reserve and by other local environmental groups. A programme of children's activities such as quizzes and pond dipping was also offered.

During the year we hosted 3 visits by external groups from further afield, including 2 environmental groups and one photographic society. We also participated in the work of two local environmental groups, established to improve co-ordination and collaborative working amongst the important wildlife sites situated along the Ure River.

In July we organised a walk around the Pennycroft site to show the changes taking place particularly in relation to the restoration work of this quarrying site. In October we hosted Nicholas Watts, MBE, who talked about Farming and Conservation, and his many years and initiatives over his 60 years involvement of Vine House Farm. In November we organised an evening talk by Marek Borkowski of Wildlife Poland, focusing on his life spent in wildlife conservation, an event which attracted over 60 attendees.

Species Recording

Visitors and those working on the Reserve are encouraged to submit records of their sightings of species so that we can measure the effectiveness of our management regime and contribute to the regional and national data relating to environmental changes. Records are kept of species seen on the Reserve and within a defined wider Recording Area surrounding the Reserve. A team of Volunteer Recorders collates, verifies and comments on these records and this information is published in an Annual Report which has a wide circulation. This annual publication schedule was disrupted by the Covid pandemic but we made progress in catching up with the publication of the 2022 report and the compilation of the 2023 edition during the year.

In addition to the records submitted by members, the Thursday Volunteer team continued their involvement in two bird monitoring programmes run by the British Trust for Ornithology, i.e. the Nest Record Scheme and the Wetland Birds Survey. These activities are yet another commitment for volunteers but provide invaluable data to assist in achieving the aim of improving biodiversity on the Reserve, and to contribute to the national body of data. We also use camera traps to monitor wildlife and have a programme of moth trapping events. The "In at the Start" project generates additional records through formal species surveying, creating important environmental data which will be used to inform the restoration proposals for the site, and add to the body of knowledge regarding the biodiversity and landscape impacts and opportunities presented by quarrying.

Volunteers

The Charity is managed and operated by volunteers and does not employ any paid staff. The Trustees are extremely grateful for the commitment and skills demonstrated by the volunteers who undertake a wide range of responsibilities and duties. We would particularly like to thank the Thursday team of Conservation volunteers who devote a day each week and particularly our volunteer Reserve Manager Colin Slator. We are also most grateful to Raymond and Pat Rumbold for their work in organising our bird food supplies, and to our team of volunteer species recorders and record collectors. The bird feeding routine continued to be undertaken by the small Photographic Group of members and we are very appreciative of the regular help they are providing thus allowing the Thursday team of volunteers to concentrate on Reserve maintenance and species recording. Most of the volunteers who joined us in 2018 as part of the “In at the Start” project continued to be involved during the year. The team of species recorders and the Annual Report editor also deserve mention for their expertise and dedication; our archive of records and reports go back to 1981 making the Reserve one of the most researched and recorded environmental sites in the north of England.

Structure and Governance

The Reserve is owned by Sir James Graham of Norton Conyers with whom we have a 20 year lease which runs until 2040. In December 2024 we completed a 20 year lease with James Staveley of Lightwater Holdings for the land adjacent to the Reserve which provides access, car parking and a work area and small agricultural building. This lease replaced one that expired in 2015, and on which we have been negotiating with the landlord for 9 years. The new lease mirrors the Norton Conyers lease in that it runs retrospectively from 2020 until 2024. The completion of the new lease was a major development providing us with increased security for the future.

The High Batts AGM was held on 22nd October 2024. Peter Bowman, Terry Marsh, Stuart Ward and Marian Wooding were re-elected to serve a further 3 year term as trustees, and Colin Slator was elected as a Trustee, creating a board of 8 trustees with 4 vacancies. It was disappointing that despite our best efforts we were not able to recruit any new trustees. Terry Marsh continued as Treasurer, and Alwin Knowles as Secretary and Colin Slator was appointed as Chair as well as continuing in his role as Reserve Manager. Our long serving Membership Secretary Peter Hills retired, and Marian Wooding took over this position. Our Newsletter editor, David Beeken retired and Alwin Knowles took on this work. Pat Rumbold provided admin and secretarial support to the Trustees throughout the year.

The Trustees held 5 meetings during the year, plus 2 meetings specifically addressing the issue of succession following the work undertaken the previous year to create improved management arrangements. The new system for the centralisation of records and improvement of communications via a Google Workspace was implemented as was a new computerised membership system developed by our Treasurer Terry Marsh. We created a new post of Species Recording Co-ordinator, with the appointment of Ray O'Donnell, to bring the various strands of this work under one person and to give focus to this element of our activities. We intend to continue with this approach to other elements of our work so as to create clearly defined roles and responsibilities which may attract more people to serve as trustees and to volunteer with us.

As with many charitable organisations, we face an on-going problem that our volunteer workforce is aging whilst we are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit new volunteers. Our

membership has grown significantly over the past two years, and there is greater interaction with members, but we find that few are interested in any long term volunteering commitment. This poses a great challenge in maintaining those teams which need trained and experienced volunteers, and crucially in maintaining an effective and cohesive Board of Trustees.

During the year a full review of the Health and Safety policy was undertaken, and First Aid Training courses were provided for Thursday team volunteers, in order to keep their qualifications up to date.

Financial report

Expenditure for the year totalled £16,129 a decrease of £7,024, related to the costs of the Anniversary celebrations in the previous year, plus savings of almost £2,500 on printing and postage as we moved circulation of the annual report from hard copy to digital. There was however an increase in the amount spent on maintenance and repairs of £1,727. Total receipts for the year were £18,702, down on the previous year by £2,655 which primarily reflected a one off grant payment for plants of £2,000 received the previous year. Membership income increased by £1,856 though fund raising through bird food sales reduced by just over £1,000. Sponsorship remained at the same level.

Overall there was an operating surplus of £2,573 and at the end of the year total assets were £47,419, including a reserve of £20,000.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf by Colin Slator on 29th July 2025

Accepted by the AGM on 28th October 2025

High Batts Nature Reserve

Summary of Accounts for Year Ending 31 March 2025

<u>Last Year (2024)</u>		<u>This Year (2025)</u>	<u>Diff (+/-)</u>
Income			
£1,071.45	Donations	£317.96	-£753.49
£3,773.85	S.O. Subscriptions	£5,770.32	£1,996.47
£1,593.50	Cash Subscriptions	£1,453.00	-£140.50
£4,423.55	Bird Food Sales	£3,330.00	-£1,093.55
£974.91	Bank/BS Interest	£1,270.54	£295.63
£1,029.15	Gift Aid	£1,140.57	£111.42
£4,000.00	IATS Sponsorship	£4,000.00	
£2,000.00	Miscellaneous	£90.00	-£1,910.00
£1,650.00	Report print re-imburse	£700.00	-£950.00
£70.00	Talks & Lectures	£630.00	£560.00
£771.00	Sales		-£771.00
£21,357.41	Total Income	£18,702.39	-£2,655.02

Expenditure			
£610.51	Open days, meetings etc.	£675.48	£64.97
£3,647.24	Cost of Bird Food Sales	£2,516.46	-£1,130.78
£1,113.35	Bird Food for Reserve	£806.05	-£307.30
£1,940.02	Printing and Stationery	£843.06	-£1,096.96
£1,644.22	Postage	£179.40	-£1,464.82
£2,910.88	Maintenance and Repairs	£4,638.34	£1,727.46
£1,758.39	Plant Hire	£1,716.76	-£41.63
£1,127.52	Insurance	£911.51	-£216.01
£461.00	Rent and Leases	£461.00	
£1,435.20	Portaloo	£1,462.80	£27.60
£520.00	Refreshments	£673.02	£153.02
£2,112.30	Misc	£1,122.67	-£989.63
£3,719.43	Anniversary celebs		-£3,719.43
£153.60	Bank Charges	£122.80	-£30.80
£23,153.66	Total Expenditure	£16,129.35	-£7,024.31
-£1,796.25	Net Excess/Deficit	£2,573.04	£4,369.29
£46,642.48	Balance at End of Last Year	£44,846.23	-£1,796.25
£44,846.23	Current Balance	£47,419.27	£2,573.04

Made up of:

HSBC Main Account	£4,194.03
HSBC Membership Account	£5,891.87
Skipton Building Society	£36,785.58
Petty Cash	£288.52
Bird Food Stock	£553.27
Creditors	-£294.00
Debtors	
Total Assets	£47,419.27
Reserves	£20,000.00
Retained Income	£27,419.27