

Rochdale
Field Naturalists
Society



Annual Report
2025



Welcome to the new style Annual Report of Rochdale Field Naturalists Society.

We are pleased to report that 2025 has been another successful year for the society.

Membership

Membership remains stable at 111 members.

We're delighted to welcome **nine new members** of the Society this year.

On a sadder note, we're sorry to have to report that two members and two former members have died.

Charles Flynn died in late December 2024. He was a talented ecologist and generous with his knowledge.

Eileen Clutterbuck died in June, and her husband **Derek** died in late November. Derek and Eileen were very active members in our society, leading walks for many years, and both Derek and Eileen were honorary members of RFNS.

Peter Sutton died in October. He was an RFNS member for a number of years, mainly attending coach trips and Indoor meetings with his daughter Kate Bullock.

Kathleen Davies died aged 97. Members will remember her as Paddy. She was an active member of the society into her 80s.

Current RFNS membership = 111

93 standard members,

17 life members

1 honorary members

The cost of membership in 2025 was £10 per year and we intend to keep it at that rate for 2026 as well.

Communications

We have changed the way we communicate with our membership. The monthly newsletters have come to an end. We encourage our members to sync with our Google Calendar and we direct members to the Website to view the rolling programme.

We convey urgent notices via our WhatsApp group. These changes make things much more efficient for the publicity team and also avoid members consulting out of date information. We thank Laura Ettrick for the many years she produced the newsletters.

Pam Crofts has again produced a beautiful calendar with photographs from the Facebook Page.

We continue to develop our online presence, widening the Society's reach and delivering our message of caring for and learning about nature to many more people than ever before.

Facebook

Our Facebook page continues to thrive and buzzes with interesting discussions and stunning photography.

It has 567 members at the moment.

Website

Our website, rochdalefieldnaturalists.org.uk gets about 4000 'hits' every month, which is not bad for a little local Society like ours. It is the place to go to find more information about Field Nats events, for information about Rochdale wildlife, and for links to many useful nature and environment resources, both local and national. The website is where the Events Calendar lives. Just tap on an event and you will get all the details we currently have available about it pop up in a box on your screen.

WhatsApp

As mentioned above, we have WhatsApp groups too, which are private and for members only. All members are strongly encouraged to join the RFNS white group, as that is where urgent messages are posted - last minute changes to event details, cancellations and so on. It's also where to let us know if you're late or lost on one of our events.

The yellow group is much more informal and is for social chat and information on sightings.



Coach Trips

The Outdoor team arranged eight coach trips this year. The cost of coach trips will remain at £20 per trip as despite a huge loss on the Llanfairfechan coach trip in January, you came out in force to RSPB Old Moor in February and to Kettlewell in June. Other trips were to Sizergh, Kirkby Steven, Staveley Nature Reserve, Clapham Nature Trail, and Marbury.

Paul Whiting's and Vinny Holt's reports of their day out at Old Moor and Wombwell Ings give a flavour of these trips. Many thanks to them for sharing!

Paul writes:

"Rochdale Field Naturalist Societies February coach outing saw 39 members and friends leave Rochdale at 9am for the journey over the Pennines to sites in the Dearne valley near Barnsley South Yorkshire. A slow crossing of the Pennines due to speed restrictions of 20 mph in places, after a services break for refreshments and a comfort break we arrived at our destination just after 11am.

The coach dropped the 25 of our party close to Wombwell Ings and birding started for some whilst putting our gear on with Siskin and Redpoll starting our list off.

The access road, car park area, was next with Collared Dove, Chaffinch, Dunnock and Great Tit feeding next to the cars.

A quick walk across the playing field followed before entering the RSPB managed site of Wombwell Ings

A good variety of wetland birds were on view and a flock of Meadow Pipits landed but we couldn't pick up the Water Pipit reported earlier.

A flock of Wigeon grazed the grassland whilst Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, Mallard and a lone Shelduck graced the water, with Coot, Moorhen, Grey Heron and Little Egret on the peripheries whilst a Buzzard drifted past.

The river edge produced a Chiffchaff working the riverside trees for insects and a singing Greenfinch got our attention.

On leaving the main field back on the road a large mixed small bird flock was found feeding on seed put down to attract them, dozens of Reed Bunting and Chaffinch, Blackbird, Stock Dove and a single Yellowhammer found by one eagle eyed member which was a year tick for a lucky few.

The walk through Gypsy marsh was not very fruitful (it can be very good for migrant warblers and Dragonfly in the warmer months of spring and summer) but it was the safest way to cross the busy dual carriageways on our way to Old Moor RSPB for a welcome brew and comfort stop before exploring the rest of the Reserve. Our off site walk of just over 3 miles was a good addition to our visit and I made it 42 species seen for our efforts.

More birds were added on the second half of our outing with well over 50 species for the day. We returned to the coach for 16.00 before a good run home to Rochdale getting back for 17.15".

...and here's Vinny's report of the same day:

"It's a damp misty start to the Old Moor reserve ramble. Half the coach brave a 2 mile offsite ramble, [to Wombwell Ings] the rest play it safe on the reserve.

A quick visit to the woodland bird feeders and we quickly tick off 15 species, including Bullfinch, Reed bunting, a bevy of Long tailed tits.... and a rat.

Next onto the scrapes to watch floating gulls shadow the diving ducks, hovering up all the disturbed morsels on the surface.

We watch two cocky Little grebes mix it in with the bigger boys.

Onto next hide, followed by much excitement when a Marsh harrier is spotted sitting on a post. Two hours later he's spotted again...still on same post...less excitement now.

The clinging cold sends us shivering into the cozy cafe for a quick warm and a very welcome cup of hot tea. We see 15 other members cupping their hot mugs..

Nicely thawed out we head to the Bittern hide and sit in disbelief as a peregrine settles on a little island. Strange, all the dabbling ducks in the vicinity calmly go about their usual business. The real danger must be when this fella's in the air... No Bearded tits today...too flipping cold I reckon. The final hide rewards us with a pristine Goldeneye - diving for afternoon tiffin.

Everyone's back on the coach, all 39 counted out and counted back...homeward bound happy, warm and content after another great day in nature's company."



Car Trips

On the months with no coach, the Outdoor team arranged car trips to RSPB Coombes valley, North Cave Wetlands and Silverdale and this Saturday (December 13th) we'll be off to Marshside.

Again, thanks to Paul for this report on the North Cave trip, which gives a great feeling of the enjoyment, even on a rather grotty day for weather!

"With a poor forecast of heavy rain and weather warning it was hardly surprising that a few of our members decided the trip over to North Cave wasn't for them!"

As it turned out the hardier members who made the trip were rewarded with a nice day out, warm with a few showers, but not the deluge forecast.

The 10 members who made the trip were rewarded with some great birds a few Butterflies and Damselflies and interesting plants.

We started with a juvenile Marsh Harrier posing behind the Butty van, fledged the day before!



Next on to east hide where Laura found a cracker, a Wood Sandpiper no doubt on post breeding migration and partially in moult but a great bird to find.

As the weather brightened up a bit a few Butterflies made an appearance with Gatekeeper, Large White, Meadow Brown, Red Admiral and Peacock all being observed along with Blue tailed and Common blue Damsels.

We completed our first circuit in time for lunch at the covered seating area and enjoyed our packed lunches or van purchases.

Second half we drove down to Crosslands hide and visited the two hides to the west where again some great birds kept us entertained

Mediterranean Gull, Egyptian Geese, Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper. A good number of Common terns were around with lots of young about. Plenty of gulls as well, Black Headed (with lots of young), Common, Lesser black backed.

Lots of ducks and geese about but most of the ducks in eclipse I spotted a sandpiper fly off towards Crossland hide so made a



note to check on the way back to our cars

The rain did arrive around 3.30 so in a quieter spell we called it a day around 4-ish

Paid a quick visit to Crosslands hide and Roger spotted the Sandpiper: another nice bird, a Green Sandpiper a great way to finish our visit. I managed 52 species of birds but probably missed a few that others saw

Thanks to those hardy members who made it an enjoyable day out, despite the weather forecast."

Paul Whiting also deserves our thanks for arranging our very successful residential trip to Aberfraw in Anglesey.

Local Recording Walks

The monthly local recording walks and garden surveys are a vitally important part of the work of the Society - members have been surveying the local wildlife for over 150 years, and our detailed and accurate records of what's found in regularly surveyed locations around the Borough are very useful to ecologists.

We thank Karen Cowley and Sheila Simpson who are responsible for the local recording walks and garden records for the Society. They have worked closely with Greater Manchester Ecology Unit to help link our records to the new electronic SWIFT Recording system, and to make our local recorders familiar with using it.

Thank you to Pam and Roger Crofts for sharing their notes on some of the walks:



This year we started in January with an afternoon birding at various local reservoirs.

In February we had a very soggy morning at Piethorne, drying off while enjoying a pint and a snack at the Bulls Head, [a pragmatic decision given the conditions, but some members are definitely hoping a precedent has been set!- Ed]

In the area by the lodges on the March trip to Alkington Woods we witnessed the emergence of a huge number of Clark's Mining Bees which were very active around their holes and the newly opened Willow catkins. Later we saw Ring-necked Parakeets in the woods and there were good views of a Dipper on Wince Brook very close to Middleton town centre.

Then in April we visited Syke where we had amazing views of a Stoat bouncing along, over, through and around a dry-stone wall. We watched it for several minutes before it disappeared into the vegetation.

June - Lower Naden. This was a beautiful summer's day which



provided a host of butterflies and other insects in the meadows. As a result we stopped for lunch much sooner along the route than we had planned which meant that we were able to watch a family of Grey Wagtails and two Dippers on Naden Brook while we ate.

July - Ealees Valley and Whittaker. WOW! Not one but two Little Owls on a wall on the hills above Whittaker.

In August we explored Blackstone Edge and White Holme Reservoir. Common Sandpipers and Linnets also several species of Damselfly and Dragonflies... and some great views on a lovely sunny day.

The autumn found us visiting Hopwood, Turnslack Clough and Clegg Hall. Fungi galore, including a wide variety of interesting waxcaps.

...and next week we'll be at Queen's Park for a morning walk and Christmas lunch at the café.

We are very grateful to everyone who has assisted with a trip this year, and to the Outdoor team for arranging the programme. If you don't already, please consider assisting with a local walk, coach or car trip.



Indoor Meetings

We have had a variety of talks at the well-attended indoor meetings starting with Paul Barrington's presentation of GM Nature Recovery Strategy, followed by talks about sphagnum moss, otters, kestrels, threatened invertebrates, butterflies and undersea wildlife.

We'd like to thank the behind-the-scenes volunteers that make everything tick, by turning the heaters on, arranging the room, taking the subs or supplying the refreshments.

Gill Wrigley booked the speakers this season.

If you'd like to help with this next season, or if you have any ideas for speakers, please let us know.





Conservation and Education

The Cons and Ed team kicked off 2025 with the now traditional New Years Day bird race, which was a even more of a challenge this year due to difficult weather conditions.

The Dawn Chorus morning at Watergrove was popular. Highlights were seeing a nesting Little Ringed Plover, hearing and seeing a Garden Warbler and Cuckoo. We spent some time searching for an elusive Grasshopper Warbler too

In February, inspired by Andy Mather's Otter talk, we held an animal tracking event at Elton Reservoir, which was a new event by the Field Nats and was well attended. The area along the River Irwell was particularly productive and we spotted otter spraints and tracks.

In May we held a bird and bat evening at Greenbooth reservoir, which was also successful and well attended.



There was a brief appearance by the Barn owl and a tawny owl was heard calling. Common Pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats were heard using bat detectors. A slug on the butterbur was found to be *Arion Flagellus*.

Not to everyone's taste; we held workshops at Falinge Park on Scatology and Slug Identification.

There was a modest turn out of approximately eight people for Slug Identification in September. Staff at Falinge Park were very supportive. It was agreed that it is important to put on similar Cons and Ed events such as this, which may challenge people but leads to wider knowledge and understanding. Feedback from attendees was good. Gill also noted the interesting range of slug species people brought along with them.

Scatology. A remarkably non-smelly event due to the fact that Laura Ettrick had put a great deal of thought into finding a pleasant way to study animal poo.

Plop Trumps card game and laminated pictures of suitable droppings to 'treasure' hunt. Hmm!

Actually it was really interesting and good fun.

Janet laid the trail of cards around the park for the outdoor session, some of which were pinched before it even started! The event was very well received.

Laura will keep the resource pack for future events.

Stoney Hill

As well as our other activities RFNS have been working with other organisations like the Stoney Hill Group.

Several RFNS members regularly volunteer and have helped them achieve a the top mark of Level 5 Outstanding award from North West in Bloom for the 5th year running (its not about pretty garden centre blooms), and being the first Community led Green Flag award in Rochdale which was also shortlisted for The Best Volunteer Group and Best Biodiversity Awards.

Surveys

Several of our volunteers are part of Nature Watch who have been helping Rochdale Council to survey various sites within the borough with a view to them being uplifted for biodiversity.

Due to inclement weather, the Barlow Bottoms survey held on 24th May was curtailed. A new date of 21st June allowed a second survey to be completed. The results of both dates have been submitted to Whitworth Town Council.

Throughout the summer months Jenny Short arranged



and led members on bee recording walks in Mandale Park for the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust.

We would like to thank all those concerned with this valuable survey and conservation work.

A note from the Co-Chairs

There is one worrying threat to the continued success of the Society. This is the vacant post of Treasurer. Since the AGM papers went out, we have noticed that the job description for Treasurer has not been updated to reflect that the role is simpler now that we are almost cash free. We will be further simplifying the role and sharing some of the Treasurer's responsibilities amongst other Committee members.

Ruth Hardcastle has kindly stayed on as Treasurer for two years longer than she intended, but she will not be carrying on beyond the AGM. Not having a Treasurer has serious implications for our society, with a huge increase in membership costs to pay for a bookkeeper. Please have a chat with one of the Committee members if you think you could take on a Treasurers' role.

Lastly, we would like to thank all the other members of the Steering Group for their help in running the Society, we couldn't do it without you!

We look forward to a Nature filled 2026 with you!

Gill Wrigley and Pete Knowles
Co-chairs.

