



**Yorkshire**  
Wildlife Trust

**Barlow Common Local Nature Reserve six-month report  
October 2020 – March 2021**



*Winter footpath through teasels at Barlow Common Nature Reserve*

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## **1. Summary**

This report primarily covers the six months from October 2020 to March 2021 following from the previous 18-month report from March 2019 to September 2020, the timing of which was impacted by Covid-19 and the initial national lockdown during the first half of 2020. It also provides information from previous years for comparison.

After the resumption of practical reserve management in late summer/early autumn 2020 (see previous report), subsequent lockdowns in the autumn and winter of 2020/2021 led to a further suspension of all work not essential to immediate health and safety and site integrity. Winter site inspections were undertaken by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust staff where a few maintenance issues were found, and all addressed at the time. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust staff liaised with staff from Selby District Council over some concerns raised by nearby residents regarding nature reserve access and anti-social behaviour during these later lockdown periods. This led to additional patrols by staff and volunteers from both organisations during the early part of 2021. As Covid restrictions eased, practical volunteering tasks on the nature reserve recommenced from the end of March 2021.

Public engagement continued to be impacted by Covid-19 regulations. The Scout camp remained closed throughout the period except for leaders undertaking essential maintenance. The Forest School toddler group also closed for a significant period at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic but was able to open again as an educational group in October 2020. The fishing lake remained closed for day tickets, but as lockdown restrictions eased, a Covid safe booking system for season ticket holders came into operation implemented by the leaseholder. The latter also continued to act as 'eyes and ears' on the nature reserve. Due to Covid-19 the visitor centre/education building and toilet remained closed.

Unfortunately, wildlife recording, and associated training days, also suffered during the year with both breeding bird survey and butterfly monitoring visits cancelled during the initial lockdown. Butterfly monitoring was able to resume as restrictions eased later in the summer. This report will present a summary of wildlife survey information.

Finally, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust management responsibility for Barlow Common Nature Reserve passed from Andrew Gibson (Living Landscapes Officer based in Hull) to James Searle (Living Landscapes Officer based in York) during the first quarter of 2021.

## 2. Reserve management

### 2.1 Volunteering

All nature reserve management at Barlow Common is coordinated and overseen by a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Living Landscape Officer (LLO). However, much of the practical work to deliver reserve management is undertaken by between 10 and 20 dedicated local Yorkshire Wildlife Trust volunteers. A comparison between typical annual volunteer hours for different tasks at Barlow Common and the volunteer hours achieved in 2020/2021 is provided in Appendix 1 of this report. Unsurprisingly, volunteering was severely impacted by Covid-19 from April 2020 to March 2021 in the following areas: visitor/education building and toilet maintenance (down nearly 100%); practical nature reserve tasks (down 75%); and wildlife monitoring/surveys ((down over 65%). Voluntary site wardening (patrols/litter-picking) increased in the first quarter of 2021 following recruitment of two new volunteers. From end of March 2021 practical and survey volunteering activity returned to near normal. Building and toilet cleaning will recommence when volunteers feel safe to do so.

### 2.2 Habitats and infrastructure

During October 2020 the volunteer team and LLO turned their attention to scrub habitat management. This followed on from the late summer meadow cutting and clearing identified by the previous report, that benefits wildflower diversity on the nature reserve. In addition, some more widening of path edges was carried out. However, at the announcement of a second lockdown in England late in the month, these, and other works not essential to health and safety and site security, had to stop along with all practical volunteering tasks. This situation continued until the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions during March 2021. Volunteer tasks resumed on 29<sup>th</sup> March, when 8 volunteers joined the LLO to carry out a site inspection and litter pick. On the same visit, bramble was cut from meadow fences to allow future repairs, damaged boardwalk boards were replaced, and woodland trail signs and route marking repaired.

### 2.3 Health and safety

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust staff undertook site safety inspections throughout the period and carried out minor site maintenance work. On 5<sup>th</sup> January a full tree safety survey was undertaken, and a hazardous tree taken down at the back of the scout camp area. Covid safety signage at the main carpark and electricity substation entrances to the reserve were checked and still in place. The current leaseholder at the fishing lake also continued to act as 'eyes and ears' on the nature reserve by reporting any issues or anti-social behaviour that came to his attention.



*Volunteers cutting path edges. Path edges have been widened in places to improve access around the nature reserve.*



### 3. Public engagement

Public engagement and visits to the nature reserve continued to be impacted by Covid-19 regulations during the period. Changes to national restrictions included announcement of second and third lockdowns in England at the end of October 2020 and in early January 2021 respectively. In addition, a tier system affecting travel between local authority areas came into effect from mid-October 2020 and continued into 2021. At the same time, the instruction that people should keep local for exercise led to continued demand for access to the nature reserve. Restrictions gradually eased during March 2021.



*Den-making. Forest School activities at Barlow Common provide local children with opportunities to develop deep and rich connections with the natural world. They were able to re-start in October 2020.*

The three groups with formal agreements for activities on the nature reserve all continued to be impacted by Covid-19 restrictions to varying extents. The Scout camp remained closed to groups, although their staff and key volunteers maintained a regular presence to undertake maintenance and ensure site security. The fishing lake continued to operate in line with government guidance with access restricted to local season ticket holders only. The Forest School Toddler group (for children under 6 years old) also closed at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, it was able to re-open as an educational group from 15<sup>th</sup> October and seven sessions took place involving a total of 43 children and up to 3 leaders from then until the end of 2020. Annual totals of Forest School toddler group sessions and children attending are provided in Appendix 2 of this report. It is intended to provide activity summaries for all groups with user agreements on the nature reserve in future reports.

The visitor/education centre building and toilets were closed for the whole period. As detailed in the previous report, daily cleaning and checking by volunteers stopped in March 2020 due to government restrictions and concerns about Covid-19. The continued restrictions and unavailability of volunteers has meant they remain closed.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust responded to Selby DC enquiries over issues raised by members of the public during the period. In late November 2020 the unavailability of day passes for the fishing lake was raised and the situation explained. In mid-January 2021 access to the council carpark was blocked, apparently by nearby residents concerned about nature reserve visitors breaching lockdown rules. In addition, we were made aware of concerns about anti-social behaviour on the reserve and over-full litter and dog waste bins.

In response to these concerns, Selby DC directed their District 'Covid Wardens' to undertake patrols of the council carpark and nature reserve from early February. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust also recruited two volunteer site wardens to undertake patrols and litter picking from March 2021 at the nature reserve. While we have received no reports from Selby DC wardens during the period, our volunteer site wardens have reported no further issues other than occasional litter and over-full bins (especially dog waste). The latter remain the responsibility of Selby DC.

## 4. Wildlife monitoring and survey training

Since 2016 Yorkshire Wildlife Trust have organised annual Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) and facilitated butterfly monitoring transects organised by the charity Butterfly Conservation as part of a national survey. This work will provide reliable biological and ecological information to inform nature reserve management. The nature reserve and facilities also provide a suitable training venue for survey volunteers from other sites for both monitoring schemes.

Sadly, the BBS could not be undertaken in 2020 due to the first lockdown 'stay at home' rules. However, a survey training day took place on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020, before the lockdown was announced, with 7 people in attendance. The butterfly transect monitoring was delayed but once the restrictions eased during the summer of 2020, the surveys were able to begin and took place every week from June until end of September.

### 4.1 Breeding Bird Surveys



*Female Blackcap. Blackcaps are common summer breeding visitors to Barlow Common and small numbers overwinter*

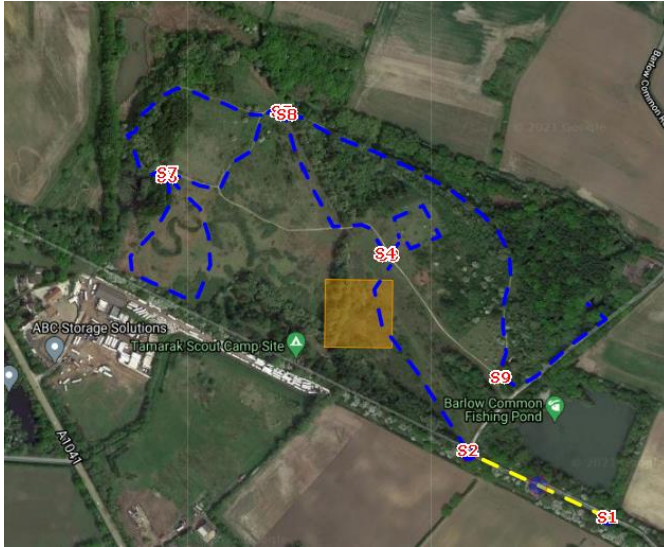
A summary of the bird species recorded across 4 years of surveys from 2016 to 2019 can be found in Appendix 3 of this report. In total 61 species have been recorded on the nature reserve during survey visits over this time. The five commonest breeding birds at Barlow Common in order of abundance are Blackbird, Wren, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, and Chaffinch. All are birds of woodland and woodland fringe habitats with a good shrub layer. The nature reserve also holds smaller numbers of breeding birds requiring open/mixed scrub

habitats including Willow Warbler, Green Woodpecker and Linnet along with wetland birds such as Moorhen, Coot and Reed Warbler.

It is especially pleasing to note that Cuckoo continues to be recorded as breeding on the nature reserve. It is a species that has undergone severe decline in breeding numbers nationally. Overall, the mix of bird species currently breeding at Barlow Common attests to the present mosaic of diverse mature and colonising habitats and the management undertaken to maintain them.

### 4.2 Barlow Common butterfly monitoring

Unlike the BBS survey, the longer season for butterfly monitoring meant that visits were eventually able to take place in 2020. A summary of butterfly species and numbers recorded on the nature reserve between 2016 and 2020 can be found in the Appendix 4 of this report.



*Above: Butterfly transect survey map of Barlow Common. The route gives good coverage of the different habitats on the nature reserve*

Butterfly numbers in 2020 were reported as a little down on previous years, with the drought of early spring 2020 perhaps partly responsible. There was a dramatic drop in Ringlet numbers in particular, a species that favours damper longer grass and shade. Gatekeeper and Small Copper numbers were also low. However, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue and Brown Argus all had a good year. The latter two species favour open low growing flower-rich grassland so may have benefitted from this year's slower plant growth.

## 5. Looking Forward

Along with many other nature reserves and publicly accessible green spaces, the continued impacts of Covid-19 are being felt at Barlow Common through 2021. However, the gradual easing of restrictions from March onwards has led to a resumption of several routine management and public engagement activities on the nature reserve. In addition, new initiatives are planned for 2021 and beyond.

As already mentioned, fortnightly volunteer tasks resumed at the end of March. These have continued to the time of writing (July 2021) allowing us to slowly catch up with infrastructure and path maintenance.

The Scouts camp is preparing to open to groups again, while the Forest School toddler group resumed activities in April 2021. The Scout leaders have also changed their padlocks to gates along the electricity substation entrance track to improve site security. The fishing lake remains open for season ticket holders. While the visitor/education centre toilets remain closed, we are now able to discuss resumption of cleaning with previous volunteers or recruit anew. A new Forest School group, with an experienced accredited leader based in Selby, is about to start a series of trial activities for older children (6 to 12 years) from the local area. If successful, they will continue, engaging a wider audience towards a deeper and richer experience of the nature reserve.



*Bumblebee visiting Viper's Bugloss flower. The open grasslands of Barlow Common fill with colour and life in the summer.*

During 2020/21 Yorkshire Wildlife Trust submitted bids to Heritage Lottery Recovery Fund for costed works at Barlow Common. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful, but we will continue to look for opportunities.

Both breeding bird surveys and butterfly monitoring visits along with volunteer surveyor training are taking place in 2021. Moreover, North Yorkshire County Council have informed us that they intend to undertake a botanical survey of the nature reserve in 2021 as it is

designated by them as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The resulting biological data will not only provide insights into the current ecological condition of the nature reserve but will also prove invaluable to informing ongoing and future management planning.

Finally, Selby DC have committed to further support for the nature reserve, and we look forward to discussing future initiatives with them for wildlife and people.

*James Searle, Living Landscapes Officer*



## Appendix 1

### Comparison of typical annual volunteer hours by activity with those of 2020/2021

*Practical nature reserve tasks e.g. habitat and infrastructure maintenance (1 x 5 hours per fortnight, average attendance 5-6 volunteers):*

Typical year – 24 tasks and total volunteer hours: 660

April 2020 to March 2021 – 6 tasks and total volunteer hours: 165

*Building maintenance and toilet cleaning (cleaned daily 20 minutes):*

Typical year – total volunteer hours: 120

April 2020 to March 2021: 0 hours

*Wildlife surveys:*

Typical year -

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) - 1 volunteer and 10 x 4 hour visits plus admin = 50+ hours per year

Butterfly monitoring - 7 volunteers and 25 x 2.5 hour visits plus admin = 80+ hours per year

April 2020 – March 2021

BBS – 0 hours

Butterfly monitoring – 7 volunteers and 17 x 2.5 hour visits plus admin = 55+ hours total

*Site wardening i.e patrols and litter-picking (1-2 volunteers x 1 hour per visit):*

Typical year – volunteer hours included within practical task days

April 2020 – March 2021 and ongoing: 3-4 visits per week in March = 15 hours total

#### **Volunteering summary:**

Activity	Typical annual hours	2020/21 hours	Percentage difference
Practical tasks	660	165	-75%
Building/toilets	120	0	-100%
Wildlife surveys	130+	55+	-68%
Site patrol/litter pick	-	15	
<b>Total volunteer hours (min)</b>	<b>910+</b>	<b>235+</b>	<b>-74.2%</b>

## Appendix 2

### Annual totals of Forest School toddler group sessions and children attending

	Number of 3 hour sessions	Total number of children attending
2015/16	51	266
2017	46	356
2018	47	413
2019	44	440
2020	18	149



### Appendix 3

**Table of bird species recorded during survey visits 2016 to 2019 (no survey in 2020):**

	Ave	2016	2017	2018	2019
Little Grebe	1.0	1	1	1	1
Great Crested Grebe					V
Grey Heron				V	V
Mute Swan				V	
Greylag Goose	1.3	1	1	2	1
Canada Goose					V
Common Teal				V	V
Mallard	3.0	3	4	2	3
Wood Duck	1.0		1	1	V
Eurasian Sparrowhawk			V	V	V
Common Buzzard	1.0	1	V	1	1
Common Kestrel	1.0	1	1	V	V
Common Pheasant					V
Common Moorhen	2.8	1	3	3	4
Common Coot	1.3	1	1	2	1
Northern Lapwing					V
Common Wood Pigeon	4.0	4	V	V	V
Tawny Owl			V		
Common Swift				V	V
Common Cuckoo	1.0	V		1	1
Green Woodpecker	1.0	V	1	1	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2.5	2		3	
Common Kingfisher		V			
Skylark					V
Barn Swallow				V	V
Pied Wagtail					V
Meadow Pipit	1.0	V			1
Winter Wren	12.5	14	10	9	17
Dunnock	2.8	3	1	4	3
European Robin	7.3	1	8	11	9
Northern Wheatear				M	
Common Blackbird	17.5	19	13	17	21
Song Thrush	4.5	4	3	3	8
Mistle Thrush	1.0	1	1	1	V
Eurasian Reed Warbler	1.7	V	1	2	2
Lesser Whitethroat					M
Common Whitethroat	6.3	4	4	6	11
Garden Warbler	1.8	4	1	1	1
Blackcap	12.0	9	8	15	16
Common Chiffchaff	10.5	14	10	9	9
Willow Warbler	5.5	3	8	5	6
Spotted Flycatcher					V
Long-tailed Tit	1.0	V	V	1	V
Marsh Tit		V			V
Willow Tit		V			V

Coal Tit	1.0	1			V
Blue Tit	6.0	3	6	8	7
Great Tit	3.0	2	2	4	4
Eurasian Treecreeper			V	V	V
Eurasian Jay		V			V
Black-billed Magpie	1.0	1		1	1
Eurasian Jackdaw				V	V
Carrion Crow	1.7	2	V	2	1
Common Starling					V
Common Chaffinch	9.0	7	8	9	12
European Greenfinch		V			
European Goldfinch			V	V	V
Linnet	2.5	1	4	1	4
Common Bullfinch	1.0	1	V	1	1
Yellowhammer		V			
Reed Bunting	1.0			1	V

V = recorded but breeding not confirmed, M = migrant

## Appendix 4

### Butterfly totals for each species recorded during surveys 2016-2020 and average:

Years	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average
No of Walks	25	24	25	25	17	
Small Skipper	2	2	0	0	1	1
Large skipper	0	0	2	0	0	0.4
Dingy Skipper	0	0	6	0	0	
Brimstone	7	12	15	7	5	9.2
Large White	87	67	199	95	100	109.6
Small White	63	159	394	185	158	191.8
Green-v-White	71	65	96	21	24	55.4
Orange Tip	7	7	6	12	8	8
Small Copper	3	10	12	7	0	6.4
Brown Argus	0	0	9	4	6	3.8
Common Blue	11	50	102	20	49	46.4
Holy Blue	2	5	18	4	9	7.6
Painted Lady	5	7	2	96	0	22
Red Admiral	13	78	10	36	26	32.6
Small Tortoiseshell	6	9	14	28	67	24.8
Peacock	69	68	39	295	116	117.4
Comma	19	64	33	33	27	35.2
Speckled Wood	65	103	148	101	81	99.6
Wall	0	7	0	0	0	1.4
Gatekeeper	38	131	137	101	46	90.6
Small Heath	27	99	117	81	103	85.4
Meadow brown	173	176	257	257	180	208.6
Ringlet	125	47	80	97	6	71
<b>Totals</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1166</b>	<b>1696</b>	<b>1480</b>	<b>1012</b>	<b>1229.4</b>