



Members' Newsletter

Upper Ouse Conservation Trust
July-October 2025 #002
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Nature

A rare bird sighting, filming for a nature documentary and sustainable farming are just a few of the nature-related features this issue!

Community

Take a look at our interpretation board design, discover about our partnership with Jennyruth Workshops and see what our volunteers have been doing!

Landscape Character

Find out our exciting news and have a look at the installation of the mobility kissing gate set within the boundary wall.

Education

See what Askham Bryan students have been doing over the summer months in Townend Field and get the latest update on the school field!

Now Open!



On Thursday 2nd October, we were delighted to have over 100 people join us (plus school children,) for a ribbon cutting event to officially open the permissive footpaths at Townend Field Nature Reserve.

A huge thank you to everyone who has been involved, whether that's from having the initial idea to protect Townend Field as a community, donating, volunteering or being a part of the journey in any way. May this be the first of MANY years of wildlife and the community enjoying Townend Field Nature Reserve!



Using the reserve

Please be respectful of wildlife, residents and school pupils.

- Private land: Stay on the marked permissive footpaths.
- Children must be supervised at all times.
- Please pick up after your dog.
- No fires (including BBQs,) ball games or picnics.



- Dogs on short leads (Townend Field only) when no sheep grazing (The oak notice board at the entrance will make this clear).



- The Long Carr is particularly wildlife sensitive: No dogs allowed (a gate will also help to prevent sheep going on the Long Carr).



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Objective 1:

Create a safe and lasting environment for wildlife to thrive, preserving the diverse wildlife existing on the site and developing the environment to encourage wildlife to return to the site.

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An Incredible Discovery!



Thanks to an Askham Bryan camera trap, we have the only confirmed sighting of a single common crane in North Yorkshire in the past 6 years!

The common crane is the UK's tallest bird, standing up to 1.2m tall, with a distinctive grey plumage and black, red, and white head and neck. After a 400-year absence, it was successfully reintroduced to the UK through the RSPB and WWT's Great Crane Project, with populations now breeding in Norfolk and the South West. These majestic birds are opportunistic omnivores, feeding on seeds, roots, insects, and small animals. Wildlife expert and volunteer Dave Watkins also picked up on a common crane bird call on his recording equipment the day after this photograph was taken, suggesting our rare visitor enjoyed his or her stay before heading off on the rest of their journey!

About Himalayan Balsam



You may have seen our call for volunteers to help with 'balsam bashing' since taking on ownership of Townend Field. Himalayan balsam is a problem because it is an invasive species that outcompetes native plants, damages riverbanks through erosion, and negatively impacts biodiversity. It grows rapidly to form dense, tall stands that block sunlight from other plants, has shallow roots that fail to stabilize soil after the plant dies back in winter, and spreads its seeds quickly and easily downstream via its explosive seed pods and water flow. This leads to a reduction in native plant diversity, a decline in habitat quality for native insects and animals, and increased erosion and flooding risks. It will, unfortunately, grow again next year, but with the hard work it will be significantly reduced and with a push each year, we are determined to eradicate it as much as possible on the reserve.



Hay crop: Sustainable farming

We were delighted to see the first hay crop of Townend Field Nature Reserve. Our tenant farmer has agreed to not use any chemicals whatsoever to support the aims and objectives of the nature reserve, with nature at the heart of everything that we do. We are looking forward to seeing sheep grazing in the top field over winter, which also helps to manage the land in a sustainable way.



A kestrel perching on one of the hay bales

Filming in the reserve: Lucy Smith



We were approached by independent film maker, Lucy Smith, to film the reserve as part of an episode of programmes exploring different topical issues. This particular episode discusses if land should be used for housing or for nature. Lucy interviewed trustees David, Lou and Graeme as well as filmed shots across the nature reserve. We are eagerly awaiting seeing the final edit and will let you know where you can watch the episode as soon as we hear!



Moth Surveys



Canary Shouldered Thorn



Ruby Tiger

Our very own survey team have carried out several moth surveys at different locations across the nature reserve. Over 150 different moth species have been discovered so far! It is building up a more detailed picture, which can help us to see which moths the reserve is supporting, but also which moths we would expect to see but have not. This can then help to inform our management plan to help biodiversity at Townend Field Nature Reserve.

Long Carr gate installation

In readiness for the nature reserve opening, Mike Webster installed a gate separating the lower field (Long Carr,) from Townend Field. It is able to open for vehicular access such as for any maintenance work needed in the stream, but otherwise provides pedestrian-only access onto the Long Carr.

Please remember to close the gate behind you to prevent dogs and livestock getting onto the Long Carr.





Bat Walk

Earlier this year, we offered a special bat walk for members and it was a brilliant evening (complete with chocolate cake!) Unfortunately, the bats weren't out in the numbers we were hoping for, but we did manage to get fleeting glimpses of some different bat species.

Dave Watkins, who led the bat walk, has kindly been gathering data on the bats in Townend Field Nature Reserve and has offered to run further bat walks next year in the height of the bat season! We are SO lucky to have Dave leading the way on identifying species of bat, bird and moth around the reserve - thank you, Dave!



Drainage Board

The drainage board have previously sprayed the banks of the streams flowing through the land and have dredged it. To align their work with our aims and objectives, we have agreed the following:

- To avoid dredging the whole length of the Ouse Beck construct a sand trap system where the beck enters the Long Carr. The traps to be cleaned out periodically when needed. Spoil to be disposed of by agreement. It would avoid potential harm to possible water vole habitats as well as other species. This would be experimental to see if it is an effective measure of avoiding build up of sand and silt in the stream bed and restricting flow.
- Cut the bank side vegetation every other year and alternate sides. Cut to be maintained no lower than 150mm.
- No use of chemical sprays.

Yorkshire Water

The 'Yorkshire Water River Health Team' are working with us to carry out water quality surveys and other water surveys along the streams that flow through the reserve. They are pleased with the water quality and have carried out a 'riverfly survey,' locating a number of shrimp and caseless caddis and mayfly. Whilst they were there, they also caught 6 small stickleback fish whilst doing the survey, which they were nicely surprised by.

Further along, the team found a number of different species including Alderfly, clams, lots of water boatmen and an abundance of stickleback.

Anna Warrington, the River Health Investigation and Engagement Lead said "Hopefully over time more wildlife, insects and invertebrates will return... I feel it would be worth seeking guidance on how to improve the streams, to vary the bed material to make it more attractive for insects to lay their larvae and encourage other species in. It is important that the drainage board do not clear any more material out of the streams."

As you can see, we are taking expert advice and acting upon it swiftly to ensure that we are doing the best for our native wildlife.

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Objective 2:

Create a lasting benefit for the local community through permissive access and participation in positive action for nature. Strengthen community sense of place and connection to nature.

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Partnership with Jennyruth Workshops



Jennyruth Workshops is a local registered charity dedicated to providing meaningful work and skills development opportunities for adults who have learning disabilities. We were delighted to commission Jennyruth Workshops to create each of our signposts, gate signage, bench plaque at the entrance and our noticeboard at the entrance. They had wonderful attention to detail, have worked tirelessly to bring us high quality signage for the nature reserve and we were glad that many of those who were involved were able to come and see their hard work in-situ at our opening event. Many thanks to all of the team at Jennyruth Workshops!



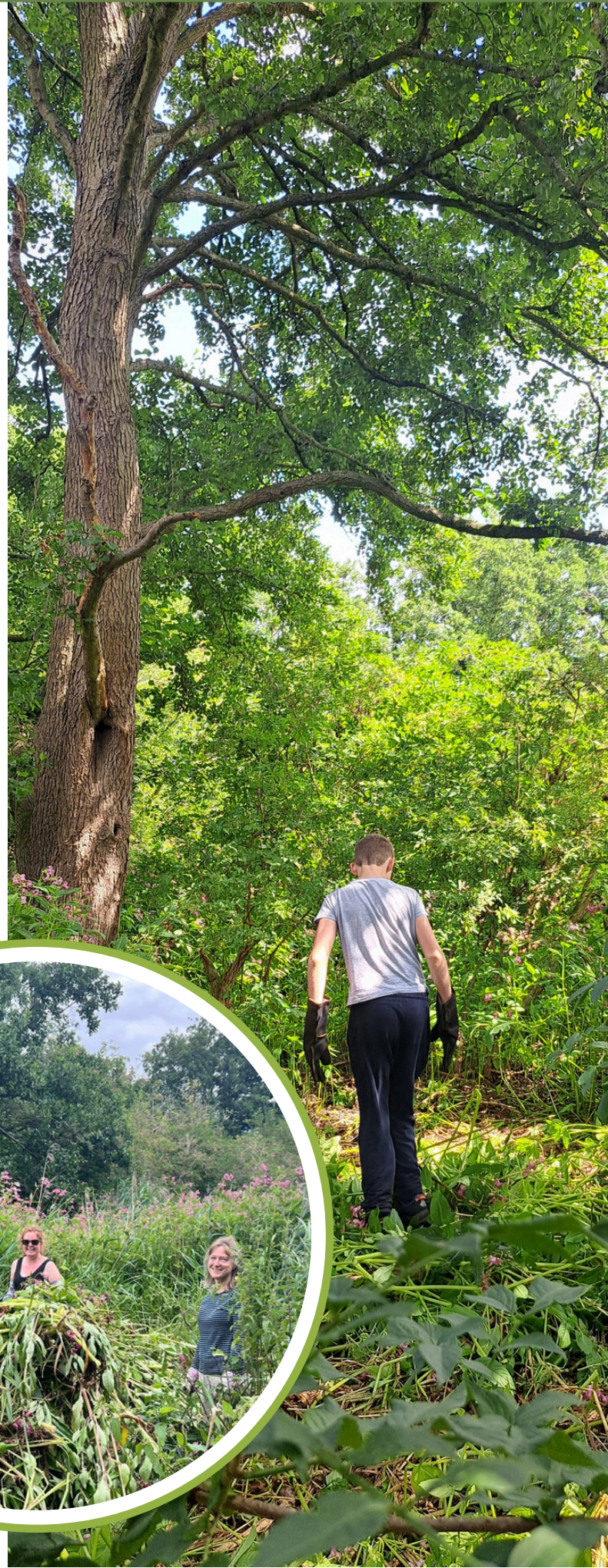
Volunteering

Andrew Haynes (our volunteer co-ordinator,) has been incredible in running several balsam bashing events so far. We are so grateful to everyone who gave up their time to help out and between our volunteers and the National Trust Beninbrough Hall volunteers, the reserve is almost completely free of balsam (until next year!)

The last remaining bits of balsam will be pulled up by 17 year old Sam, who is working towards his Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. All of this hard work means that next year (now that the trust has ownership of the site,) the balsam problem will be much easier to tackle, as we can start early with very few plants left in the ground. Previously scattered seeds will still germinate, but year on year the cumulative effect of being relentless in pulling out this invasive species will no doubt have a positive impact and will allow native species to return.

Have you thought about volunteering? We will have a range of opportunities in the future, from fundraising events such as pop-up cafes, manual work such as balsam bashing, to assisting with wildlife surveys and much more! We would love to hear from you. Please do head to our website at www.uoct.org.uk , go to our 'get involved' section and sign up on our volunteering page.

Thank you!



Map - Permissive footpaths




Thanks to the talented Luke Crawford, we not only have a brilliant website, but also a bespoke map, showing Townend Field Nature Reserve. The general routes of the permissive footpaths are shown below. 'Permissive footpaths' means that people have permission to go on particular footpaths on the land owned by the UOCT but that these footpaths can be changed. This will be in response to conditions such as wet areas, but also to allow the ground to rest, to avoid particular plant and wildlife species and in response to any other issues which may arise.

Our main objective is 'nature,' so although we also have the aim of 'community' in allowing people onto the permissive footpaths, everything we do must keep nature as the top priority. That is why we are balancing the desire for dog-owners to use the field by keeping it as dogs on short leads in Townend Field only (when the sheep are not in the field.) There are no dogs (or sheep) allowed on Long Carr, as it is particularly wildlife sensitive.


Important update: 'The Long Carr Loop' is now open for visitors without dogs.

Townend Field Nature Reserve

Key



-  Entrance
-  Wetland Habitats
-  Great Ouseburn Primary School and School Playing Field

Townend Field

-  Judi's Walk: Permissive Footpath

Long Carr

Sorry; no dogs allowed on Long Carr

-  The Island Walk: Permissive Footpath
-  Long Carr Loop: Permissive Footpath

*Permissive footpath routes may vary throughout the seasons.
See noticeboard for updates.*



Beninbrough Hall: National Trust support continues

Sam Shipman and his hard working team returned again in the summer; this time, to help clear a large area of invasive Himalayan Balsam. We are very grateful for their continued time, support and expertise. Thank you so much!



Memories of Townend Field

We are beginning to gather written and oral history from people who have memories of Townend Field.

Are you someone who used to use the field? Do you know someone who did?

We'd love to hear from you!

Head to our website and click on 'Get Involved' then 'Sightings & Memories' or email us at info@uoct.org.uk

Thank you!

First Members' meeting

Thank you to everyone who came along to our very first members' gathering! It was wonderful to see so many friendly faces and hand out membership cards in person. A reminder that if you haven't collected your membership card yet, you can do so at Great Ouseburn Village Stores or get in touch with us if you need help with this.

At the meeting, we heard inspiring updates from trustees David Lloyd, Graeme Jackson, and Lou Rayner, plus a few words from our fantastic volunteer co-ordinator, Andrew Haynes.

You can catch up with the slides on our website if you missed them. To find the slides, simply head to our website at www.uoct.org.uk, go to the 'blog' area and find the post about the first members' meeting.



Interpretation Board

Have you seen our specially designed interpretation board, created by trustee Lou Rayner? It features the map by our very own resident website creator Luke Crawford!

The board is colour-matched to the green in our logo and has been designed to last, providing essential information to visitors to the field.

There is also a small wooden noticeboard on the entrance gate for seasonal messages.

Welcome to...

Townend Field Nature Reserve

A rich, diverse site, purchased and opened in 2025 by the Upper Ouse Conservation Trust (UOCT) after overwhelming support from the public. The UOCT are a group of local individuals, who are passionate about preserving this beautiful landscape for nature, education and the community.

Townend Field Nature Reserve is home to a range of important habitats including pond, flowing stream, wetland areas, hay meadow, woodland and riparian habitats. One of several special visitors recorded here is the elusive quail; a rarely seen bird that prefers high-quality, unimproved grasslands. Over the coming years, UOCT will be looking at ways to improve the habitats and attract even more wildlife!

Ahead of you is 'Judi's Walk', which is named after Dame Judi Dench. With a personal connection to the area, she publicly supported our campaign to purchase Townend Field as a community benefit society, resulting in over £275,000 raised in just 4 weeks.



ox eye daisy



Nearest defibrillator:
Great Ouseburn Primary
School (outside entrance
on Main Street)

uoct.org.uk



Please be respectful of wildlife, residents and visitors.

- Private land: Stay on the marked permissive footpaths.
- Children must be supervised at all times.
- Dogs on leads. Restrictions apply. See notice board.
- Please pick up after your dog.
- No fires (including BBQs), ball games or picnics.



quail

An FCA registered Charitable Community Benefit Society - number 9441
Registered address: Post Office, Main St, Great Ouseburn, North Yorkshire YO26 9RG



Key

- Entrance
- Wetland Habitats
- Great Ouseburn Primary School and School Playing Field

Townend Field

- Judi's Walk: Permissive Footpath

Long Carr

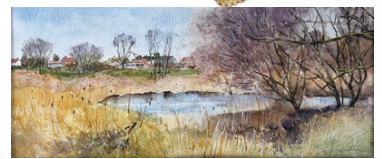
- The Island Walk: Permissive Footpath
- Long Carr Loop: Permissive Footpath

Sorry, no dogs allowed on Long Carr

Permissive footpath routes may vary throughout the seasons. See noticeboard for updates.



round-winged moth



Above: Local artist Colin Swinton's interpretation of Townend Field Nature Reserve

A Fascinating History
Ouse Gill Beck marked the boundary between Roundheads and Cavaliers during the English Civil War, with skirmishes reported here after the 1644 Battle of Marston Moor. It still divides the two parishes today.

In 1925, a Circus was established in Ouseburn, with Simla the elephant using Townend Field for his regular walks!



hedgehog



knapweed



ragged robin



grey heron



alder

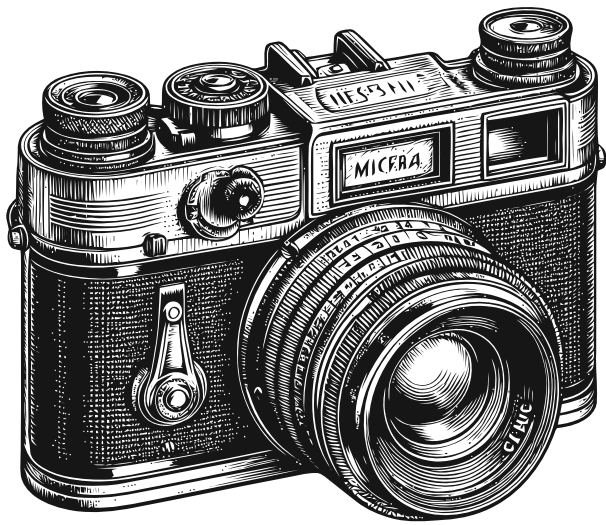
female catkins

Get Involved!

- Please report wildlife sightings to us via our website.
- We are always looking for funding to support our ongoing conservation work; please donate if you can.
- Register your interest to become a volunteer.
- Become a member of the UOCT and receive updates.
- See our website for details!

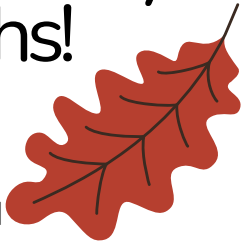
Thank you for your support.





Please send us your photographs!

As the seasons change and wildlife at the reserve prepares for winter, we would love to see your photographs! If you would be happy for us to share them on social media, please email them to info@uoct.org.uk



Fundraising

We haven't carried out any fundraising since the initial huge effort to raise £275,000 in just 4 weeks! Now that the reserve is under our ownership and the essential preparations have been carried out to allow us to open, we need to move towards a new phase of fundraising to support our work to maintain and enhance the reserve.

If you have a fundraising idea, we would love to hear about it!

If you are able to, please also consider setting up a regular standing order donation to the Upper Ouse Conservation Trust, to provide ongoing financial support. Every bit really does help!



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Objective 3:

The views the land affords are a significant feature of the village and are specifically mentioned in the village 'Conservation Area Character Appraisal'. We will look to maintain this whilst further developing nature and wildlife on the site.

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New mobility kissing gate entrance

We hope you agree that the brand new accessible kissing gate entrance fits in really well with the landscape. The gap in the wall already existed and was the perfect size for our new entrance, meaning that everyone can enjoy Townend Field Nature Reserve! We have a bench just inside the entrance for those with restricted mobility to still enjoy being within the reserve. With thanks to the Boroughbridge Lions for their contribution towards this - it is greatly appreciated.



Above: The previous fencing before the new entrance was installed



Boroughbridge Lions Club

We are pleased to have donated towards the purchase of a Kissing Gate at the entrance to Townend Field Nature Reserve.

What a fantastic facility this area is in Great Ouseburn.

Big News: Call for Sites

It's official... the areas previously marked on the 'Call for Sites' as potential areas for development, have been officially removed!

It marks a formal recognition that Townend Field will not be used for development, as would have been likely to happen if the trust had not purchased the field with your incredible support!

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Objective 4:

Facilitate use of Town End Field by Great Ouseburn School, promoting health, environmental awareness and nature connection.

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School updates



The school are finalising plans for a wooden fence to go around the perimeter of the area leased to the school (for a nominal amount,) which will enable the children to more than double the footprint of the outdoor space currently available to them... and with no astro-turf or tarmac!

The area is a few metres in from the boundary of the school grounds on either side to respect the neighbours and will mark a huge milestone in the school's history. Keep an eye on our blog page on the website and/or social media for updates.

In other news, trustee Kate Yates is busy planning an after school nature club for pupils to get hands-on with the nature reserve and discover more about the wildlife on their doorstep.

Children in 'Phoenix Class' (Year 3/4) are now taught by trustee Lou Rayner, who got in touch with Dame Judi Dench earlier in the year to ask for her support in the fundraising campaign. In October, pupils wrote letters to Dame Judi Dench to thank her for her role in publicly backing the fundraising effort. We recently got a message to say that "Judi was THRILLED with the letters, she adored them!!"





Askham Bryan



Staff and students at Askham Bryan College continue to make use of the nature reserve to support their education programme and in turn, support us in better understanding the existing wildlife at Townend Field. Without their camera traps, we would never have had the first confirmed sighting of a common crane in North Yorkshire for 6 years!

We look forward to continuing this wonderful partnership and are proud to be supporting education beyond the immediate area.

Duke of Edinburgh

We have been approached by two students completing different levels of their Duke of Edinburgh awards. One is volunteering to clear the Himalayan balsam and another we are hoping will be able to support the after school nature club at Great Ouseburn Community Primary School.

If you, or someone you know is taking part in their Duke of Edinburgh Award and is interested in volunteering for us, we would love to hear from you! We take safeguarding very seriously and will need to find a suitable role with supervision from a parent/carer as appropriate. Depending upon the time of year, age and availability, future activities could include supporting wildlife surveying, helping to produce material for social media and helping to plan and organise fundraising events.

Email us at
info@uoct.org.uk to
register your interest.





Thank you!

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Next newsletter:

Keep an eye out for our next members' newsletter, coming at the beginning of 2026!

Thank you for your continued support,

The Trustees at the Upper Ouse Conservation Trust

Website:

www.uoct.org.uk

Email:

info@uoct.org.uk

