



# 2025 Annual report

This report has been written by active members with different elements written by different members. This will hopefully include more people next year.

## **Butterfly Survey** (Jem Dunford)

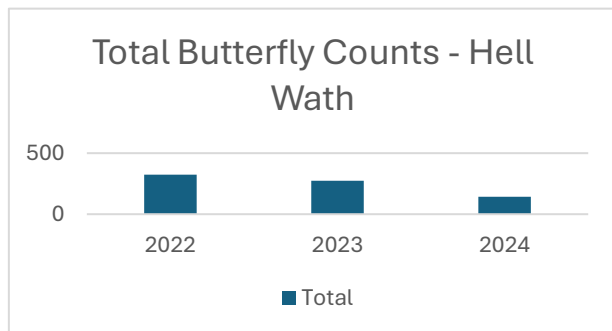
We have a team of 11 volunteers who undertake annual butterfly monitoring as part of the National UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

The volunteers are in groups of two and three on a weekly rota between April and October planning each weeks walk to try and catch the optimum conditions (High sunshine and temperature with low wind). They walk an agreed route, divided into 8 sections. Only butterflies seen within a set distance from the route during the timed walk are included.

This is a very social activity with members taking part in training in identification but relying on shared 'discussions' to agree what white flappy thing has been seen. The walk is leisurely and tends to be on fair weather days. Who could ask for more.

New volunteers are always welcome, no experience is needed. You would be teamed up with volunteers when have done it before (who were all novices when they started in 2022).

### ***2022-2024 overall count totals.***



## 2023-2024 Hell Wath species variation.

Small Skipper			Brimstone			Large White			Small White			Green Veined White			Orange Tip		
1	0	-1	5	1	-4	24	29	+5	34	21	-13	2	4	+2	16	8	-8
Small Copper			Holly Blue			Common Blue			Red Admiral			Small Tortoiseshell			Comma		
4	0	-4	12	0	-12	1	0	-1	55	5	-50	3	1	-2	15	2	-13
Wall Brown			Gatekeeper			Small Heath			Speckled Wood			Meadow Brown			Ringlet		
1	1	=	2	1	-1	1	1	=	35	25	-10	60	40	-20	2	1	-1

As you can see Hell Wath exhibited a mirror of the national decline reported last year in the national press, led by the damp and cooler spring and early summer.

The overall decline on Hell Wath over the three years underlines the need to further the work in habitat improvement to allow for rich grasslands, woodlands and managed scrub boundaries.

### Plant Survey (Matthew Adamson)

A project was started in 2024 to record all the plants growing on Hell Wath. To do this the site was divided into 108 50m squares and all the plants growing in each square were recorded. The results will tell us which parts of the site have the highest plant diversity, and which plants are the most widespread across the site.

A small team of volunteers went out regularly to record the squares systematically over the year and the results were entered into a mapping database called MapMate from which distribution maps could be generated showing exactly where each plant was growing.

All vascular plants and bryophytes were recorded and we also included in the survey lichens and fungi. The survey will continue for another year and at the end of 2025 we hope to have available distribution maps for all the plants of Hell Wath which will form a baseline for future planning and a historical record of the site as it was a quarter of the way into the twenty-first century.

Taxa Categories	Vascular Plants	Bryophytes	Fungi	Lichen
	290	62	68	10
Total	430			

Of these, 123 taxa have been recorded from only one square while at the other extreme Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) is the most widespread plant, recorded in 87 squares.

Our coverage of the vascular plants is fairly comprehensive but more systematic recording of the lichen and bryophytes is needed for 2025. Most of the fungi were recorded in two field visits by the Mid Yorkshire Fungus Group led by Andy Woodall.

### **Tree & Shrub Planting** (Matthew Adamson)

Our ongoing plant survey indicates that the tree and shrub diversity on Hell Wath is very low. The canopy woodland trees are mostly Sycamore, Elm and Ash of which the last two are suffering high mortality from Dutch Elm Disease and Ash Dieback.

The scrub and woodland edge habitats are dominated by Hawthorn and Blackthorn with very few other species present.

A tree and shrub planting programme was planned for 2024/2025 to increase species diversity on site and with the help of commuted sums from NYCC the following species have been sourced:

Species	No.	Species	No.
Sessile Oak	5	Dogwood	50
Small-leaved lime	5	Guelder Rose	50
Hornbeam	5	Wayfaring Tree	50
Field maple	5	Dog Rose	50
Walnut	5	Sweet Briar	50
Sweet chestnut	5	Field Rose	50
Cherry	5	Wild Privet	50
Rowan	5	Holly	25
Crab apple	25	Yew	10
Spindle	25	Honeysuckle	10
Buckthorn	20	Wild Clematis	10

The trees are being planted in the woodland to replace the ashes and elms, and the shrubs and climbers are being planted along the woodland edge and in the wood meadows and glades.

### **Wildflower seeds and Planting** (Jane Horton)

As part of our work with Plantlife, volunteers have planted both perennial plug plants and sown annual flower seed in areas of Hell Wath highlighted as being of particular promise as wood meadow/wildflower areas to increase biodiversity.

Wood meadows are critically endangered in the UK and Hell Wath is an ideal site to establish more as it already has some promising areas of open meadow surrounded by a mix of scrub and woodland.

There are 4 areas noted by Plantlife as areas A,B,C and D (see attached map).These are were scythed or mown prior to planting/seeding and will require scything or mowing again

in Feb to enable a short sward therefore less competition from meadow grasses around the new growth. The seed was sourced from plantlife and from areas local to Ripon to ensure compatibility between flora and environment.

The table below shows the species identified in each target area. The areas in brackets are the grid squares on FOHW own plant survey map.

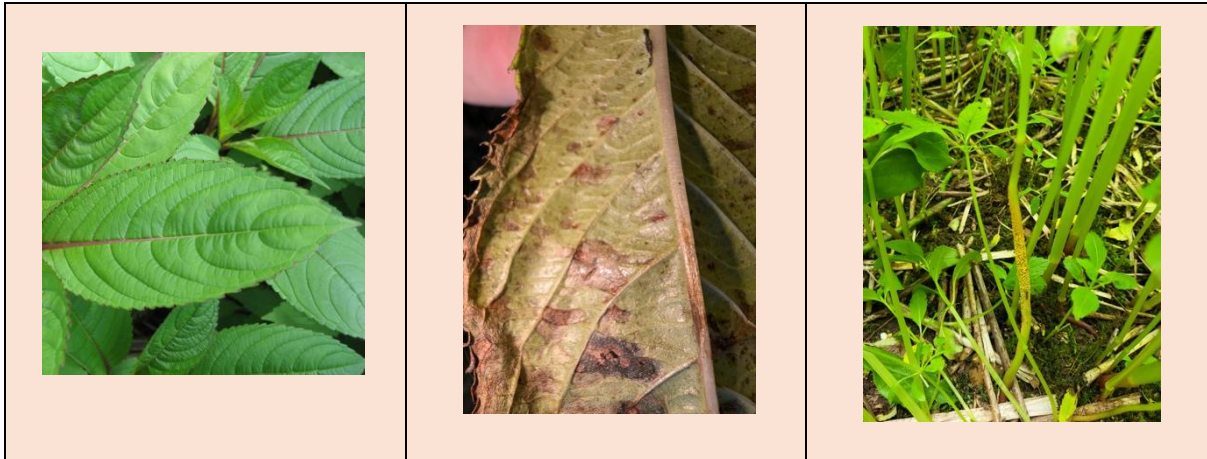
Area A (K4/5)	Area B (L5, L6, M5, M6)	Area C (N5)	Area D (G3/4)	Field 8b (Choir School Field)
Kidney Vetch Melancholy Thistle Hawkbit Trefoil Mallow Rattle	Scabious Teasel Mallow Hawkbit Burnet Rattle	Ragged robin Water avens	Scabious Hawkbit Burnet Hedge Bedstraw Honesty Evening Primrose Agrimony Teasel Mallow Meadow Cranesbill Oxeye Daisy Rattle	Rattle Cranesbill Oxeye Daisy Teasel Knapweed Wild Marjoram Purple Toadflax Agrimony Vipers Bugloss St Johns Wort Devils Bit Scabious Small Scabious

### **Himalayan Balsam** (Jem Dunford)

After the application of Himalayan Balsam Rust over the last years (funded by DEFRA and provided by CABI) monitoring was undertaken to see if it has taken. We are pleased to say that there is clear evidence of the spread of the rust with damage to leaves and stems up to 65m from the application sites.

Large areas (not where rust has been applied) were pulled and scythed this year with support from members, volunteers and local scout, guide, cub and brownie groups. Scything of open areas was undertaken as well although previous scrub clearance left stumps that made it difficult at times to scythe low enough. This has slowed the spread and growth but needs further focussed work.

<b>Healthy Himalayan Balsam Leaf.</b>	<b>Rust Affected Leaf Found on Hell Wath (Late Summer)</b>	<b>Rust Affected Stem Found on Hell Wath (Early Summer)</b>



## **Bats**

A lot of work has been undertaken this year to both record the bats on the site as well as improve the habitats for the bats.

John Pearse has taken a lead on this and was able to secure almost 30 bat boxes for free from the Bat Conservation Trust. These needed securing on trees and we were fortunate to secure two new members with training and qualifications in working at height in trees and with ropes.

Over several visits these bat boxes were installed with different types of boxes installed together around each tree.

The regional bat group then offered both the equipment and the training for members to undertake night walks with sensors that recorded the frequency of bat calls. 6 species of bats have been recorded so far.

Endoscope cameras have been used to record bats roosting in the boxes and it is clear that most of the boxes have been occupied this year.

A special mention needs to go to a junior member, Ollie Pearse. For his D of E Bronze volunteering he undertook regular static recording of bat activity. This involved coming on site, leaving recording devices in agreed locations and then recording the data produced overnight.

## **Other Key Things Of Note**

1. Plantlife accepted Hell Wath as a partnership site. There will be details about this at the meeting.
2. The Skell Valley Project continues to support FOHW as it moves into the last year of the project. Further scrub management has been undertaken, footpath surface Improvements have been completed and support has been given to

habitat improvement work in the Quarry. The Skell Valley project again funded the every successful Forest Schools Event at the end of the Summer Holidays. FOHW Trustees have committed to fund this itself again this year.

In 2025 the SVP will install interpretation panels with text agreed with FOHW, NYC and local community groups. There will also be a way-marked family walk created to encourage families to walk and explore the site. Wooden roundels will be added to the benches and other sympathetic markers will be used to show the route.

The footpath from Studley Roger has been improved to make it an accessible route with levelling to the surface undertaken and gates at each end installed that can be opened from each side (and pushed both ways) by any user including wheelchair users.

FOHW and Ripon Disability Forum are now working with NYC to make further improvements to Whitcliffe Lane so that the route from Hell Wath to the city centre can be fully accessible on one side of the road. Cllr Williams has met with Jem Dunford and walked this route and will take the information forward as a potential budget task for 2025-2026.

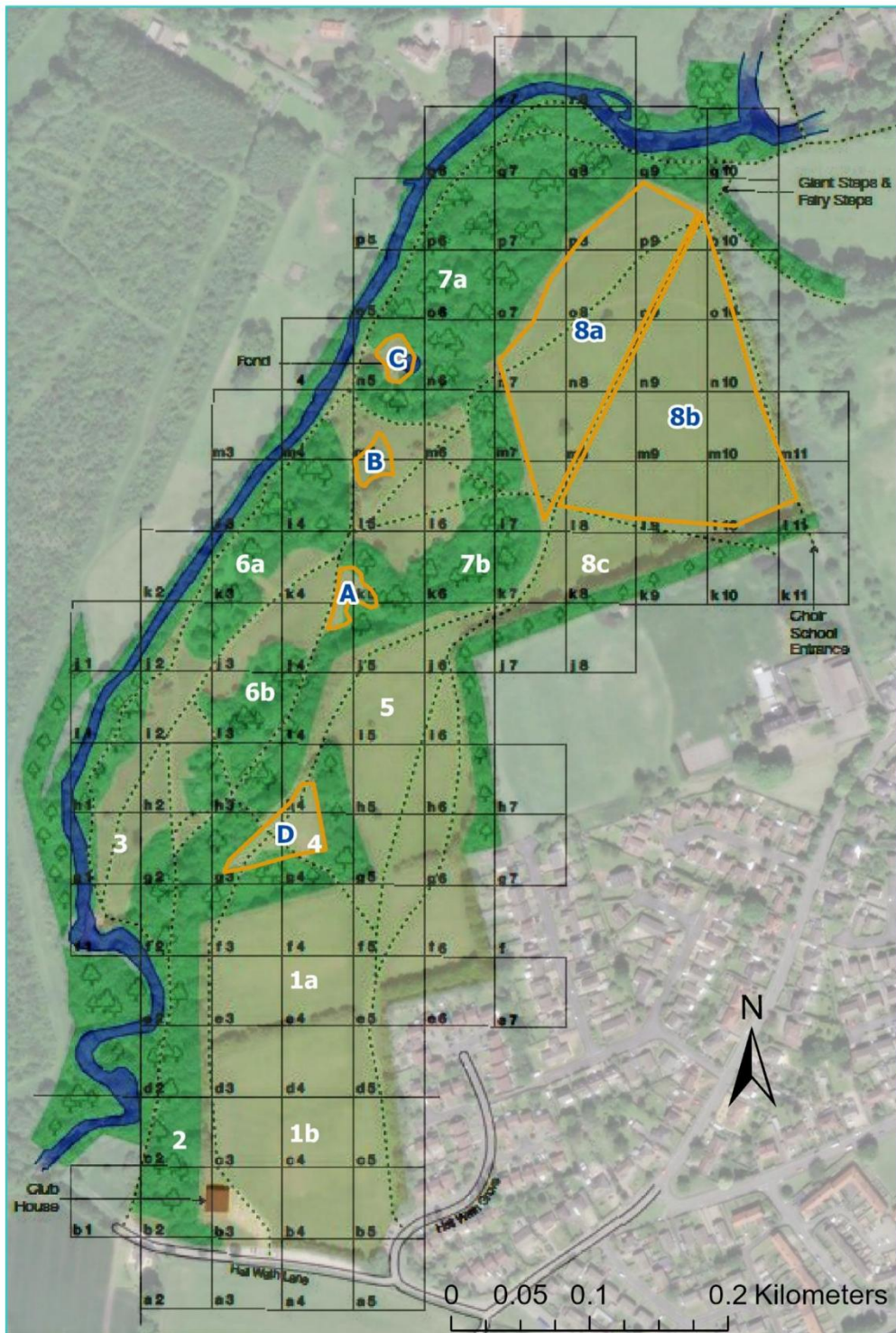
When the SVP project comes to an end at the end of 2025 part of the legacy of it will be permanent and continued ranger support to FOHW and other sites included in the project.

3. Two new log benches have been added to the site. The first was a donation from a local family in memory of family member. Sourcing this bench was difficult but eventually one was donated by the National Trust from Fountains Abbey. It came from a tree brought down in storms. The family made a cash donation to FOHW in lieu of the purchase.

The second bench was created from a tree brought down in the storms in the spring. This tree has been left in situ with the section crossing a path cut and moved to make a bench. A local supporter and Hell Wath user volunteered their time and effort to cut level tops on the benches for us.

4. Owl Boxes and Hay Balers were commissioned this year from the Ripon Men's Shed. Three Tawny Owl boxes were made and have been installed and a hand baler made to help manage the grass cuttings created from scything. They did this at a much cheaper price than commercially sourced alternatives.





**Map 3:** Map provided by FOHW including site parcel numbers 1a-8c (white) and site recording squares (black grid-squares). Orange parcels A-D, 8a & 8b were surveyed by Plantlife specifically for this report. \*Georeferenced map created in ArcGIS under license.

