

# OUR NATURE: Your Tees Partnerships Conference 2017

By Rachel Murtagh

**A LOT HAS HAPPENED IN A YEAR** since the Partnership reformed and our first article in *Wild Tees* in July 2016.

We welcome new members, adding to the existing national agencies, local authorities and larger organisations. We now have amongst our membership smaller local groups including The Cleveland Hedgehog Preservation Society, Teesmouth Field Centre, Durham County Badger Group and the Cleveland Beekeepers Association. We are keen to make sure that all the groups and organisations with a genuine interest in the nature of the Tees Valley come on board so we can truly be a representative and effective unified voice to champion the Tees Valley's natural environment.

*"This has been a very good foundational start for TVNP to provide the opportunity for all partners to network & look to create new opportunities"*

Amongst all our activity we committed to hosting an annual conference to bring everyone together to find out and celebrate what is already happening and shape the focus of the coming year for the partnership. This year we teamed up with Your Tees Catchment Partnership to host a joint 'partnerships' event. We held it at Preston Park Museum and over 90 people attended the day. The event was a mixture of presentations, varied workshops, networking, yummy food (the cream scones were particularly good) and even a spot of Tai Chi and meditation!

The day was split into three parts. The first section introduced by Dr. Weeks from Teesside University was Natural Assets and had workshops on honey bees and pollination, tackling invasive species on the Tees, Tees Valley green infrastructure planning, as well as a popular workshop hosted by the Wildlife Trust's Sue Antrobus, on the role of volunteers and friend's groups in the management of green spaces.

The second section was on Natural Growth and introduced by the new head of Culture and Tourism at the Combined Authority, Linda Tuttiett. She introduced us to the potential of outdoor activities in the Tees Valley

to develop our local tourist economy. The workshops included contributions from the National Flood Forum, with discussions on community involvement, partnership and leadership and our local Industry and Nature Conservation Association (INCA), updating us on the nature developments in the Tees estuary, including the proposed extension to the Special Protection Area (SPA) and the work of the Tees Estuary Partnership.

Following lunch, we had some 'PechaKucha' style presentations in which presenters show 20 slides each lasting 20 seconds, allowing for some quick-fire inspiration from River Tees Rediscovered, One Planet Pioneers Middlesbrough youth project (part of which is run by the Wildlife Trust's Becky Stanley with her four apprentices) and Paul Harman of Friends of the River Skerne talking about small sites and pocket parks. Paul Leadbitter came downstream from the North Pennines AONB to talk about peatlands - our very own 'Amazon rainforest' of biodiversity, carbon stores and historic landscape of international importance.

*"Very happy with the whole day - wish I could have split myself in two & attended other sessions. Good range of content looking at natural heritage from a range of viewpoints"*

Natural Health and Wellbeing, our third and final section, was introduced by Denise Orange from Public Health England. She highlighted that "there is significant and growing evidence on the physical and mental health benefits of green spaces" and "exercising in green spaces versus exercise indoors is also associated with better mental health and wellbeing". The workshops to follow on 'social prescribing' - the contribution of the natural environment to tackling health inequalities and organic farming and local food, all inspired us further. Topping the day off with a tai chi taster, allowed us a moment's reflection and was great fun to-boot!

We hope to see volunteers, members and staff, from any of the partnership organisations, at next year's conference 2018!



**Tees Valley Nature Partnership (TVNP)** is one of 47 local nature partnerships across England designated by the Secretary of State. We work strategically to conserve and enhance a healthy and robust natural environment, proven to aid our well-being and provide the natural assets vital for a healthy economy. Linking organisations in the Tees Valley's environmental, business and health and well-being sectors we form an influential partnership.



**Your Tees Catchment Partnership (YTCP)** embeds collaborative working at a river catchment scale to deliver cross cutting improvements to our water environments. The essence of YTCP is to drive cost-effective practical delivery on the ground, resulting in multiple benefits including improvements to water quality, enhanced biodiversity, reduced flood risk, resilience to climate change and greater community engagement with our local river.



# RARITIES

By Steve Ashton

**YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT** might turn up either in your garden or walking around one of the wildlife-rich nature reserves we have in the North East.

A friend and birder who was walking around Tees Valley Wildlife Trust's Bowesfield nature reserve in Stockton heard, coming from one of the reed beds, what he initially thought was either a reed warbler or a sedge warbler - both small brownish/green birds that can be found on the reserve. The sound was coming from a bird hidden in the reeds, it then changed and sounded like a blue tit, then a great tit, then went into a chorus which sounded like a nightingale and finished off with the mew of a buzzard. It was in fact a marsh warbler (pictured below right) - a very rare summer visitor to the UK, with approximately 5 pairs breeding in a small part of south east England (otherwise they are widespread across middle Europe). Since the discovery, lots of people have been to hear the sounds of this bird's amazing act of mimicry.



Rare birds do turn up in the most interesting places - a member of the public posted a picture on twitter @clevelandbirds asking what was this strange pink and black bird they had in their garden feeding in the cherry tree. It was quickly identified as a rose-coloured starling (above left) - it looks a bit like a starling which has been dipped in pink paint. This visitor, probably from Eastern Europe, had turned up in a suburban garden in Billingham. The bird stayed for nearly a week and the owners of the garden were very accommodating to the tens of people who have been to see it. Ironically a rose-coloured starling was also discovered in 1973 (by the same person who found the marsh warbler). If you do see something interesting in your garden share it on twitter with @teeswildlife you never know it might be a real rarity - and even if it isn't, we'd still like to see your pictures of wildlife in your area.