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Butterfly Conservation & The British Dragonfly Society

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## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2012



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am sure it does not need me to remind you that this summer has been one of the wettest on record. As a consequence, it has not been a good year for some types of wildlife, notably butterflies. Even the common species seem to have been down in number; Orange Tip and Red Admiral have been particularly scarce if my experience is any guide, although there was a good show of Peacock during August and September. Hopefully this will prove to be a temporary blip. A female butterfly typically lays large numbers of ova and next year, given favourable weather, a good percentage might reach adulthood and normality will return. Feedback from Farnham suggests it is not just butterflies which have had a poor year, as I understand the range of birds passing through has been rather limited. Frogs, on the other hand, have loved the dampness and my garden has been alive with them!

As most of you will be aware, HDNS has finally moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the new website is up and running. Visit [www.hdns.org.uk](http://www.hdns.org.uk) if you have not already done so. Developing the site has been a lengthy process with a few hiccups along the way, but I hope you agree that the final result justifies all the effort. Special thanks must go to Chris and Diana Wallis and Ann Mettam for their considerable work on the project. A good website is a fluid thing and we hope to maintain interest with regular updates, news and new photographs. Please bear in mind that most of those involved with the site are starting from scratch, so things could be a little slow to begin with until we learn how everything works! The long established Members' Forum will continue to run alongside the website and will still be moderated by Robert Marshall.

Looking ahead, this winter will see the first programme of lectures put together by yours truly (please note that the position of Programme Secretary remains vacant and any offers would be welcome). I am quite excited about the speakers we have lined up and hope you will give them your usual support, especially when the subject matter does not involve beaks and feathers! In addition to the lectures, Will Rich has organized a few winter field trips. The details will not be found on your membership card but are included in this newsletter and on the website. On the whole, recent field trips have not been well attended, which is a shame. They offer the chance to see interesting wildlife and there is almost invariably somebody present who can put a name to that unusual plant, moth or little brown bird – a good educational experience for those of us who are not experts.

I look forward to seeing you all during the coming months.

**David Tipping**

All meetings are held in **St. Robert's Centre, Robert Street, Harrogate** (opposite Waitrose), starting at **7.30 pm**. Parking is either on the adjacent streets or, with their kind permission, in the Waitrose car park.

**2012**

10 October **Costa Rica - Gem of Central America Re-visited**  
**Dr John R. Mather**

Following a sixth visit to this species-rich country, Dr Mather adds new images to this popular lecture including many birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, beetles and orchids.

24 October **Foxglove Covert LNR Flora and Fauna**  
**Sophia Rainer/Adam Edmond**

An overview of the creation of this local nature reserve (located at Catterick) and some of the species found on the site, from Slime Mould to Roe Deer!

7 November **Ecuador: Coastline to Cloud Forest**  
**Raymond & Pat Rumbold**

A birding trip from the south west coastline of Ecuador to the famous Tandayapa region of the Andean cloud forest near Quito.

21 November **The Biggest Twitch**  
**Alan Davies & Ruth Miller**

In 2008, Alan and Ruth visited 27 different countries and recorded a staggering 4,341 different bird species. This is their story.

5 December **A Moth Trapper's Year**  
**Dr Charles Fletcher**

An introduction to trapping moths, a look at what is on the wing each month, the special moths of the HDNS area and what is happening to moth recording in Yorkshire.

## 2013

9 January      **The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, its Reserves and its Work**  
**Alan Redden**

Looking at the objectives of the Trust, how it meets them and how people can be more involved in its work. Illustrated with information on some key reserves and activities.

23 January      **The West Tanfield Dormouse Reintroduction Project**  
**Ann Hanson**

The West Tanfield Dormouse Reintroduction Project is part of the National Dormouse Species Recovery Programme and has been monitored by the Yorkshire Mammal Group since the initial release in 2004.

6 February      **Yorkshire's Marine and Coastal Wildlife**  
**Paula Lightfoot**

An illustrated talk about the diverse and colourful wildlife found along Yorkshire's stunning coastline, from the strandline and rock pools to the hidden landscapes beneath the waves. Includes information about the YNU's popular new marine and coastal section.

20 February      **Fungi Talk** (subject to availability of speaker), or  
**Members' Evening** (bring a few slides or a memory stick)  
Details to be confirmed

6 March      **Tophill Low Nature Reserve: The Hidden Valley**  
**Richard Hampshire**

An introduction to the history and management of Tophill Low Nature Reserve, with a year of wildlife.

20 March      **Snowy Owl – King of the Arctic**  
**Gordon Yates**

A cine film presented by the maker. Spectacular wildlife in the High Arctic – searching Spitsbergen, North East Greenland, Hudson Bay and Alaska for this top predator.

24 April      **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

## QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS AWARD

Dr John R Mather has been awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Jubilee Birthday Honours List, for his many years of service to ornithology and conservation on a local, national and worldwide level. The medal was presented at a ceremony on 10 September 2012. HDNS proffers its congratulations on this well-merited award to our longest serving member: John enrolled as a member of HDNS in November 1951.

### FIELD MEETINGS WINTER/SPRING 2013

**Saturday 12 January**                      **Ripley** Winter Bird Walk (jointly with High Batts). Leader: Robert Adams. Ripley Castle Park, Birthwaite Lane, Cayton Gill. Free admission to Ripley Castle Park courtesy of Sir Thomas. Meet castle entrance 9.30. Finish approx 13.30.

**Tuesday 5 February**                      Minibus trip to **Hartlepool/Saltholme**. Leader: June Atkinson. Cost £15. Pick-up: Harrogate Trinity Church 8.30, Ripon Bus Station 9.00.

**Saturday 13 April**                      **Skipwith Common** National Nature Reserve. Leader: Paul Irving. 270 hectares of lowland heath. Woodlark, reptiles, including Grass Snake. Meet 9.45 in the reserve car park (SE664374), accessed from A19 Riccall bypass via King Rudding Lane, on left from York direction.

**Tuesday 30 April**                      Minibus trip "**Upper Humber Birding Odyssey**" Leader: Colin Slator. Cost £15. North Cave, Barton Clay Pits, Read's Island, Alkborough Flats, Blacktoft Sands. Pick-up: Ripon Bus Station 8.00, Harrogate Trinity Church 8.30.

Some of our 2012 field trips were rather poorly attended. Please support your society by coming along. Having an expert leader will open your eyes to things you would otherwise miss and can greatly improve your knowledge.

## FIELD MEETING REPORTS

### **BARDEN MOOR 8 May 2012**

Three of us (where were the other 297 of you?) set off from Barden Bridge in cloudy but dry conditions. Our attention was first drawn by Rob to a fine stand of Herb Paris and a little further on to some Toothwort (story of my week!).

Along the river we saw Common Sandpiper and Spotted Flycatcher and found a Dipper's nest under the aqueduct. Entering the woodland we were very pleased to see how well the Pied Flycatchers were doing – practically every nest box seemed to be occupied – and we had excellent views of Redstart and Wood Warbler as well. A very confident female Goosander hauled out on a rock seemed unperturbed by our presence. In the middle of the river a Lesser Black-backed Gull swooped and caught a Red-clawed Crayfish. We were quite surprised to see a number of Siskins in suitable breeding habitat, so hopefully they were not just late winter visitors. Retracing our steps to Barden Bridge we had good views of Mandarin Drakes, and very approachable Sand Martin and Mistle Thrush.

After lunching at the raptor viewpoint, where we saw little, we undertook a circular walk of Barden Moor, where we encountered Short-eared Owl, Wheatear, Curlew and a Little Ringed Plover which was displaying over the reservoir. We sought in vain for chats and Ring Ousel. On returning to the road we found some well grown Lapwing chicks in the adjoining fields, but not the hoped-for Redshank or Snipe. Other notable "ticks" on the day were Buzzard, Kestrel and Cuckoo.

Many thanks to Rob Adams for an excellent outing. **Will Rich**

### **STAVELEY 12 June 2012**

We had a cold but dry day for our visit to the newly expanded Staveley YWT Reserve.

Given the weather, the butterflies, etc, were not much on display, but we did see a solitary male Orange Tip and several damselflies, including Common Blue, Azure and Blue-tailed. A couple of spectacular Drinker Moth

larvae were also seen and a Beefly which was amazingly imitative of a White-tailed Bumblebee. Birdsong was rather subdued but Reed Warblers, Reed Buntings and Blackcaps were in fine voice. Quite a few types of flower were in bloom including unusual species such as Lesser Water Plantain and Bee Orchid. The highlights of the day, however, were a Tawny Owl which sat blinking at us in the fork of a willow; and best of all, an Otter which swam along the far shore of the main lake submerging each time it was dive-bombed by a Black-headed Gull.

The attendance was not large but meant that a companionable six of us were able easily to hear what our leader Bobby Evison was telling us about the history and ecology of the reserve. We all left feeling impressed at the breadth and depth of Bobby's knowledge. Many thanks to him for a thoroughly enjoyable day out.

**Will Rich**

## **RIBBLEHEAD 4 July 2012**

The light drizzle was only a minor irritant as we paddled (literally) around wet meadows under the expert guidance of Kevin Walker of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. And then, miracle of miracles, the sun came out for lunchtime.

It was not to last, however, and we got pretty-well drenched after lunch in a prolonged shower. All in all, though, the weather could have been a lot worse and we even saw the summit of Pen-Y-Ghent from time to time. We were mainly looking for orchids, and we were not disappointed, seeing eight species, though the last, a Lady's Slipper, was in a flower pot at the Natural England Barn. The other seven were: Common Spotted, Heath Spotted, Northern Marsh, Fragrant, Frog, Butterfly and Small White (aka White Frog). Other notable species seen were Yorkshire Sandwort, Hairy Stonecrop, Hoary Plantain, Goatsbeard, Melancholy Thistle, Northern Dock, Wall Rue, Globeflower and Marsh Lousewort. We also saw several interesting and very local species of fern and sedge.

Many thanks to Kevin for his impressive plant knowledge and to Natural England for sheltering us from the storm.

**Will Rich**

## **SMARDALE GILL NNR 1 August 2012**

We drove across the Pennines into Cumbria to the Smardale Gill National Nature Reserve, the only English site of the Scotch Argus butterfly, a species in flight during late July/August. We might also be lucky to see another English butterfly rarity, the Northern Brown Argus. Also, the reserve was home to Red Squirrels, and there were a number of orchid species that should still be in flower. When we arrived the weather was dull and overcast, with a forecast of rain; the books had advised that the Scotch Argus only flew in sunshine, so we were keeping our fingers well crossed.

After an hour and a half, or so, we stopped for lunch in an old quarry. On the way we had noted Common Spotted and Fragrant orchids among the many wild flowers, but had not by then seen a single butterfly. While we were still eating our sandwiches, we met up with another group being led by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust warden for the reserve, who told us that Scotch Argus were definitely around, and where we might see them; he confirmed we probably would not see the Northern Brown Argus as it was finished for the year.

During the afternoon, as the weather improved, butterflies could be seen flying over the moorland grasses. It was soon apparent that these included a number of Scotch Argus. We were particularly fortunate that the weather was dry, but still cool and overcast. In these conditions the butterflies preferred to rest in among the grasses to taking flight, which presented us with the great opportunity to take close-up photographs; and to capture specimens to examine in-hand. We were thus able to admire the striking, velvety, dark chocolate-brown, with an orange band, of the upper wing of a newly emergent Scotch Argus. Similarly, we were fortunate to capture and closely examine another of the reserve's less common species – Dark Green Fritillary.

It was raining steadily by the time we returned to the minibus, but everybody had thoroughly enjoyed the trip. We never saw the red squirrels, but we did see seven species of butterfly: Small Skipper; Common Blue; Dark Green Fritillary; Scotch Argus; Meadow Brown; Ringlet; Small Heath.

**Michael Pearson**



## MOTHS

Another busy summer is coming to an end for the Ripon Moth-ers, when the packing and unpacking of cars, unreeling and reeling in of cables, the ritual of placing moth traps on near-pristine white sheets and early morning starts become just a memory. We visited some of our regular haunts such as Ellington Banks (where 17 new species recorded in 2012 maintains its prominence in the top five moth trapping sites of the whole of Yorkshire), Nosterfield Local Nature Reserve (31 new species), Hackfall Woods (21 new species together with a well-attended annual public demonstration), Laver Banks military training area on the very edge of Ripon (21 new species) and Fountains Abbey, where the breathtaking vistas make us feel privileged to visit and offer many different areas of habitat in which to site the moth traps. Although the year started promisingly, with expected catches in March and April, sadly the wet summer weather also curtailed many plans or saw much reduced catches – High Batts NR was just such a casualty, when the popular Open Day had to be cancelled. Mid-year, the publication of a ground-breaking book, *Micro Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*, with its very detailed illustrations, has already seen an upsurge in the number of records submitted.

Just one new macro moth for our area appeared - the very distinctive Red-necked Footman was recorded at both Ellington Banks and Hackfall Woods, a species which has been expanding its range in northern England. A number of micro moths were first records for the Society: *Syncopacma larseniella* (Staveley NR); *Cochylis nana* (Hutton Conyers) and *Epinotia nanana* (Hackfall Woods) but some were new for North Yorkshire: *Gynnidomorpha alismana* (Staveley NR) and *Mompha terminella* (Hackfall Woods). Spending time looking more closely at a difficult family of micro moths, the Coleophora (mostly down a microscope) has paid dividends! Three new species for the Society, *C. coracipennella* (Hutton Conyers) is new for North Yorkshire and *C. sternipennella* (first recorded in 2011) has consolidated its presence, being trapped at three new sites in the area.

Autumn is still an interesting time – if the winds come from an easterly quarter from the Continent, it can bring the excitement of migrant species lurking inside your moth trap. Already one of your Recorders has caught a Scarce Bordered Straw: what else is to come? There is also the pleasure of recording such beautiful moths as Merveille du Jour, not rare but cryptically patterned, or the autumnal hues of oranges, yellows and pinks which are prevalent in members of the Sallow family. Checking the egg trays in the morning can still hold a degree of excitement: don't put your traps away just yet!

**Jill Warwick**

## FARNHAM NEWS

Wintering ducks were still in evidence in **March** with 16 Common Pochards, 43 Tufted Ducks and five Goldeneyes during the first week, when five Fieldfares flew over. Small numbers of Lesser Redpolls and Siskins were still on site and two roosting Tawny Owls were found. A Black-tailed Godwit was present on 16th and a Peregrine Falcon flew over on 18th. The first spring migrants arrived next day with two Sand Martins and three Chiffchaffs. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were seen regularly as was a Nuthatch, a frequent visitor to the site, along with Treecreeper which was carrying nesting material on 27th. Oystercatchers were back to their breeding site with eight being seen and 13 wintering Common Snipe were still present. The first Swallow flew by on 29th and a Little Ringed Plover was in on 31st.

On 1st **April**, 80 Fieldfares flew over, a Blackcap and seven Chiffchaffs were present and a Great Crested Grebe was on its nest. By the end of the first week more Sand Martins were moving through and the first Willow Warbler was singing as eight Fieldfares flew over. On 11th, 120 Pink-footed Geese and three Whooper Swans flew over to the north; two male Common Redstarts were seen on 14th. The first Common Tern arrived on 18th and called as it flew over the breeding platform, while later five Arctic Terns flew in to feed and rest. During the second half of the month, the weather can only be described as wintry, with cold northerly winds and low daytime temperatures. An Arctic Tern was present on 23rd, a Little Gull made a brief appearance on 25th and a White Stork flew south two days later. Several years ago, a free-flying male of this species used to escape from Harewood Bird Garden and travel considerable distances, but this has not been the case for some time. I am confident that White Storks which now occur have been proved to be of Continental origin by the leg rings they carry. There were two sightings of Hobby on 28th, a Whimbrel flew through the next day and the month ended with a Greenshank and two Wheatears on site.

**May** began with a run of cold northerly winds which did little to aid migration nor did it help the start of the breeding season. The first week produced Lesser Whitethroat and Garden Warblers, five Arctic Terns flew north on 3rd, with 23 through the next day when a male Common Redstart was found; two Hobbies were over the lake on 5th. The weather of Patch Watch Day on 6th can only be described as unseasonal with a temperature of minus 6°C recorded at 4.30 am; even the Canada Geese in the back field had white frost on their backs. Reasonable counts were obtained of the species present, the most notable being 16 Blackcaps, 15 Chiffchaffs, 12 Willow Warblers, five Lesser Whitethroats, two Garden Warblers, 12 Wrens, ten Robins, eight

Dunnocks, ten Common Terns, three pairs of Great Crested Grebes and two pairs of Gadwall; a Hobby was seen and a White Stork flew over. A Wheatear occurred on 12th and a Yellow Wagtail, now becoming a scarce passage bird, two days later. A flock of 15 Common Crossbills flew over on 19th and six Sandwich Terns went north the next day. A pair of Oystercatchers raised three young, the resident pair of Mute Swans produced six cygnets and a pair of Great Crested Grebes hatched two young on the North Lake; a Gadwall appeared with five ducklings on 27th. A Cuckoo was calling by the North Lake on 30th. May was a very poor month for passage migrants, especially waders.

During the first week of **June**, three newly fledged Tree Sparrows were seen along with young Blue, Great and Coal Tits. A Cuckoo was heard calling on 2nd. On 10th, a Reed Warbler was singing and the Great Crested Grebe was on its second nest, the first attempt having failed; eight pairs of Common Terns were present. By mid-month, there was one newly hatched Great Crested Grebe chick and four eggs could be seen. On 17th, newly hatched tern chicks from two pairs could be seen on the platform. On the same day, an Osprey drifted south and a Blackcap was seen feeding young. By 23rd, all the tern chicks had disappeared but we had no idea why. Water levels were rising fast and the Great Crested Grebes' nest was almost destroyed. The Sand Martins did well with 49 holes occupied in the wall. Common Buzzards were observed flying over carrying prey. Six pairs of Common Terns, unable to breed on the platforms because of the aggressive behaviour of Black-headed Gulls, retreated to Island 4. The Great Crested Grebe managed to hatch another chick before the nest was swamped. The Reed Warbler was still present. Water levels were very high for the time of year, six inches of rain having fallen during the month.

On 1st **July**, a Hobby flew over and the first Tufted Duck ducklings were seen, 18 being counted. A Greenshank flew over on 8th and a Peregrine Falcon was seen the same day. Continuing unexplained disturbance of birds on the islands gave rise for concern. The four pairs of Oystercatchers failed to produce any young and the Little Ringed Plovers, another breeding species, were rarely seen. A pair of Great Crested Grebes hatched four young on the North Lake. An Arctic Tern was present on 17th. The bad news on 19th was that the six pairs of Common Terns, which had attempted to resume their breeding activity on Island 4, had left the site. A juvenile Marsh Harrier flew south on 23rd and the Reed Warbler was still present. Greenshank and Wheatear were recorded in the third week and a Hobby flew over on 30th. The reason for the failed breeding attempts of the species on the islands was due to be investigated as a rat had been seen climbing up the Sand Martin wall one evening.

On 5th **August**, before the boat was launched to investigate the possibility of a rat problem on the islands, two Green Sandpipers flew in and stayed for a short time. As a result of the search, rats were found to be present which would account for the failure of several species which attempted to breed on the islands. It is particularly unfortunate for the Common Terns which have been unsuccessful for a second year due to predation. Later in the day ahead of thundery weather, 500 Common Swifts moved through very high. A Wheatear was present the next day and an Osprey flew south in the afternoon. Warblers were in evidence with 15 Chiffchaffs, ten Willow Warblers, Lesser and Common Whitethroats and Garden Warbler. The habitat at Farnham is not ideal for Reed Warbler but an individual had been present since June and two were seen in July giving rise to speculation. A pair of Little Grebes reared two young but there has been a decline in the species as, before the severe winters of 2009 and 2010, for many years four pairs had been present. Two pairs of Sand Martins were still feeding young in the wall on 12th and Lapwing numbers on the islands rose to 230. A juvenile Red Kite from a nearby breeding site was seen and seven Common Buzzards were in the air with three juveniles. It was not until 19th that our suspicions were confirmed when a pair of Reed Warblers was seen feeding a young fledgling - a new breeding species for the site. A Wheatear and three Spotted Flycatchers were seen next day. By the end of the month, four Spotted Flycatchers were found along with Yellow Wagtails. The south-easterly wind and rain on 27th provided ideal conditions for the arrival of a juvenile Black Tern which was present for most of the day. Another surprise, on the very wet morning of 29th, was a Little Stint which coped well with the continual harassment from the Lapwings; it was still there on 31st amongst the feet of 30 Greylag Geese. On the evening of 30th, two Greenshanks flew around the site.

The Little Stint was still present on 1st **September** when four Spotted Flycatchers were found. Three Black-tailed Godwits dropped in briefly on 3rd and a Wheatear was on the hay bales in the back field on 8th. In ideal conditions on 9th, ten Common Buzzards were soaring together over the hide. This autumn was considered to be the poorest for passage waders and migrant passerines compared to other years.

**Butterflies** During the first half of March, four Peacocks, two Commas, Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshell were seen. On 5th April, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue appeared. A few Orange Tips were seen in early May, followed in the latter half of the month by the first Common Blues along with Red Admiral, Wall and various whites. Ten species were recorded this month, but in very small numbers. In June Large Skipper, Ringlet and Meadow Brown were seen. More than 50 Meadow Browns were counted in July; the first

White-letter Hairstreak was on 12th, with Painted Lady and Small Skipper. On 15th, our Members' Day, five White-letter Hairstreaks were seen. Gatekeepers were emerging later in the month, with more than 30 counted. Twelve species were recorded this month. By the second week of August, Peacocks were emerging with 14 at a stand of teasels in front of the hide and a maximum of 30 on the site, with two Red Admirals, Wall, Common Blue and Small Copper also present at the end of the month. During the first week in September, Brimstone, Painted Lady, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Common Blue were recorded. Throughout the season, a total of 22 species was recorded. Comments from our members reflect the disastrous summer for this order. Everything recorded this year, apart from the browns, has been in very small numbers. We can only wait and hope for an improvement next year.

**Dragonflies** Damselflies were emerging by the first week in May when the first Common Blue was seen. By the third week, Four-spot Chasers were on the wing and four species of damselfly were recorded. In July, three Emperor dragonflies were present as were Black-tailed Skimmers, Brown and Southern Hawkers and a passing Banded Demoiselle. In August, Brown Hawker was the most numerous dragonfly with more than 20 being seen. Small numbers of Common Darters were emerging and Migrant Hawker was seen later in the month. Twelve species were recorded in total.

The **website** is now operating and I will be able to inform members of any sightings of interest at Farnham as they occur. I would like members to inform me of any sightings which they would like to have included on the website by leaving a message in the hide.

**June E Atkinson, Chair, Management Committee and Honorary Warden**

**FARNHAM MANAGEMENT DAYS**

**ALL SUNDAYS**

<b>2012:</b>	30 September	28 October	25 November
<b>2013:</b>	27 January	24 February	31 March

Please meet at the hide at 10 am

Do come and help to keep Farnham flourishing!

## BTO NEWS

Now that fieldwork for the BTO Atlas Project is complete I have tried to contact as many volunteers as possible who contributed in any way to the gathering of bird records, I want to extend my sincere thanks to all the fieldworkers and this has proved to be a tricky operation bearing in mind that I have 430 names listed. Many of you will have received an email from me and probably some other electronic communications but I do know that one HDNS member who has done some sterling work for me is not on the Internet.

Nationally we attracted 30,000 birdwatchers to the Atlas: this is double the existing BTO membership so you can see that we hope to maintain the interest of these people in other survey work. We had hoped to launch *The Winter Thrush Survey* last autumn but funding was not available. I'm pleased to announce that this survey will go ahead this autumn. The Thrush Survey is in two parts and will be spread over the next two winters. It comprises self-selected "Winter Walks" which can be started from the 12th September and specific sites which will be based on randomly selected squares. The squares have not been issued yet so I can't offer you any at this stage; but you can register your interest by visiting the BTO Website

[www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thruses](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thruses)

by emailing

[winter.thruses@bto.org](mailto:winter.thruses@bto.org)

or by contacting me at

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**Mike Brown**, BTO Regional Representative for Yorkshire-Central.

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