



Rick Browne

Above: Sam in the bluebells

Chair's update

How do we follow 2025?? When I look back over the phenomenal amount of work achieved across the wide range of projects, I feel a bit daunted. How do we maintain momentum? How do we maintain enthusiasm among our volunteers? How do we share out the work and responsibility to prevent burnout? Throughout this newsletter you will read the updates and plans for 2026 for all our projects. If you would like to become more involved in managing or working on a particular project of interest, please contact me.

I must express grateful thanks to Pam Pennefather who has stood down from her role as Marketing Officer and newsletter editor. Pam brought tremendous drive and enthusiasm to the DRA over the past four years. She created and managed our Facebook and Instagram pages. She managed our email account and responded to enquiries. She set up our WhatsApp groups and ensured these were GDPR compliant. She used her marketing skills to develop our DRA logo and kept me and secretary Steve on our toes to get things done on time. She is returning to work now her children have left school and needs to devote time and energy to her new life. She will of course remain a DRA member and we hope to see her

on work parties when she can be up here in the Duddon area. We wish her all the best.

May I please remind you all to submit any interesting pictures or reports to Jackie for posting on social media. Any animal/plant observations should also be reported on ***I naturalist*** or ***I record***.

If you have questions or want to find out more, just email us **duddonriverassociation@gmail.com** or please call on 07712 252753. As always, you can keep up to date with our activities via Instagram, our Facebook page and our members' Facebook group.

Rick Browne (DRA Chair)

Easy ways to help us

Please email **duddonriverassociation@gmail.com** if you spot any of the following. Please include location details, e.g. map reference or What3Words.

- Grey squirrels
- Red squirrels
- Pine marten
- Mink
- Himalayan balsam
- Skunk cabbage
- Japanese knotweed



Pam Pennefather

Wendy's Wood

by Rick Browne

Above: The newly planted trees on Stonestar Fell

Our first work project for 2026 was to plant the memorial trees in memory of Wendy Hardon. Wendy's family had raised over £3000 following her tragic death, and donated this to the DRA . It was decided a fitting tribute would be to plant trees. Duddon Hall Estate generously gave permission to plant on Stonestar Fell. We felt we should plant reasonably big trees to give an impact within a year or two rather than small whips. These would need protection from sheep, roe deer, red deer, hares, rabbits, squirrels, bracken and grass. On advice from the tree suppliers this would require: a five foot wire guard secured in the ground by two posts, a stake and tree tie to steady each tree and a plastic spiral around the base. Each tree then needed fertiliser and a mulch around the base, filling the bottom of the half metre diameter of the wire spiral to stifle grass and bracken overgrowth.

All this was going to take a fair bit of financial and logistical planning to get the job done within the best planting period of January/ February. We budgeted for one hundred trees between four and seven feet tall. We chose oak, alder, Scots pine, aspen, wild cherry and juniper.

The first work call to volunteers on 8th January saw us take delivery of two hundred fence posts, two hundred metres of sentinel wire, one hundred stakes and spiral wraps. The wire had to be cut to two-metre lengths and crimped to make a cylinder to surround both posts with the tree in the centre. The posts and wire all had to be carried up the fell from the road through rocky bracken beds. The posts had to be driven in and tree holes dug between them.

The response of our volunteers was incredible. Twenty-one hardy souls took part in several work parties through January. With great enthusiasm, fitness, stamina and determination (and an average age of over 65!) we were ready to plant the trees on 1st February. One hundred and seven trees went in the ground that day. We reserved six for Wendy's family to plant.

On 1st March we added 60grms of tree fertiliser around the base of each tree and used sheep fleece to a depth of seven inches to cover the ground inside each wire cylinder.

We now must pray for intermittent rain through this spring and summer so there is no drought to kill the trees before they can establish a good supporting root system.

Contents

Page

Chair's introduction	1
Wendy's Wood tree-planting	2
WhatsApp groups	3
E-fishing; trout and salmon	4
Squirrels	6
Mink	7
Natterjack toads	7
Millom pre-history	8
Balsam bashing	9
Sustainable Duddon	10
Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery	12
DRA summer social: Hardknott Forest	13
Diary dates	14
How to get involved	14
DRA contact information	14



Rick Browne

Above: Stephen, Libby and Lawrence plant the final trees at Wendy's memorial wood. Below: young trees are protected with wire guards, posts, stakes and fleece mulch



Pam Pennefather

Join our volunteer WhatsApp groups



Our recently established WhatsApp groups are all linked together under the 'Duddon Catchment Project' WhatsApp community, complete with a general 'Announcements' channel. This allows us to

instantly communicate with everyone, as well as keeping those affiliated with a particular workstream (e.g. balsam bashing or tree planting) updated with progress and details of volunteer sessions. It is making us much more efficient!

If you haven't yet joined our 'Duddon Catchment Project' community on WhatsApp, then please drop us an email with your mobile number and we'll send you an invitation to join.

Once you are a member of our WhatsApp community you can then select to join whichever groups you are interested in and receive the relevant communications and details of volunteer sessions associated with the group.

The WhatsApp groups we have set up are:

- Balsam bashing
- Electrofishing
- Riverfly surveys
- Water quality monitoring
- MoRPh surveys
- Leaky dams
- Tree planting
- Mink rafts
- Grey squirrel control
- Dormice boxes
- Bat monitoring
- Wildlife cameras
- FBA mussel tagging
- Data management

Huge credit must go to the hard working team of volunteers whose efforts made this happen: Gareth & Fiona, Mike & Lynne, Nick & Jackie, Vince & Jackie, Rick & Gill, Jean, Elaine, Jacqui, Dave, Keith, Ian, Malcolm, John, Richard, Peter and Steve.

On 4th April, Wendy's family— Stephen, Lawrence and Libby - planted the remaining six trees to complete the job. They expressed their most grateful thanks to all who worked to make it happen. We all look forward to seeing these trees establish over the next few years.



Lindsay McCrae

Duddon e-fishing by Hannah Teagle

The 2025 survey concluded at the end of September, providing a vital health check for Duddon's catchment. This year focused on supporting the Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery Project, expanding our historical data from the UU Raw Water Project, investigating new areas of interest in the lower catchment.

In the Upper Duddon, surveys were conducted at Goblin Beck, Sling Beck, Wash Dub, Quarry Gutter Trout, and Grassgarth Gill. Goblin Beck was the only site with a 2019 baseline for comparison. While salmon numbers have unfortunately declined, the trout population is showing great signs of improvement; fry jumped from "Good" to "Excellent," while parr numbers remained stable.

Across the other sites, trout were found in encouraging numbers, however parr were generally in higher numbers than younger fry. Salmon appeared only in very low numbers at Sling Beck and Grassgarth Gill, though Sling Beck did show a "Fair" population of parr.

Further down the catchment, we established new monitoring baselines at Troughton Beck and Black

Syke, alongside Hum Bek on Kirkby Pool and Appletreeworth Beck on the Lickle.

As the only repeat site in the lower section, Appletreeworth Beck showed a slight decline in overall



numbers compared to previous years. These new sites are crucial for our long-term understanding of the river, but data will be influenced by environmental conditions causing annual variation.

The 2025 season was unusually warm and dry, which created significant obstacles for both the fish and the surveys. At Troughton Beck, several sections of the beck dried up completely, meaning the survey only picked up fish that had managed to find refuge in deeper, isolated pools. These temperatures also restricted the work schedule; to ensure the safety of the fish, all surveying must cease once water temperatures rise above 18°C.



Tables below: results from e-fishing from 2019 to 2025
NS—not surveyed

Site	2019	2022	2024	2025 Trout Fry	2019	2022	2024	2025 Trout Parr
Goblin Beck	Good	NS	NS	Excellent	Fair	NS	NS	Fair
Sling Beck	NS	NS	NS	Poor	NS	NS	NS	Fair
Wash Dub Beck	NS	NS	NS	Poor	NS	NS	NS	Good
Quarry Gutter	NS	NS	NS	Excellent	NS	NS	NS	Good
Troutal Beck	NS	NS	NS	Absent	NS	NS	NS	Excellent
Grassgarth Gill	NS	NS	NS	Very Poor	NS	NS	NS	Fair
Hum Gill	NS	NS	NS	Excellent	NS	NS	NS	Fair
Appletree worth Beck	Good	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Excellent	Very Poor	Good	Good
Black Syke Beck	NS	NS	NS	Excellent	NS	NS	NS	Poor
Troughton Beck	NS	NS	NS	Excellent	NS	NS	NS	Excellent

Site	Salmon Fry				Salmon Parr			
	2019	2022	2024	2025	2019	2022	2024	2025
Goblin Beck	Very Poor	NS	NS	Absent	Fair	NS	NS	Absent
Sling Beck	NS	NS	NS	Very Poor	NS	NS	NS	Fair
Grassgarth Gill	NS	NS	NS	Absent	NS	NS	NS	Very Poor



Stephen Leece



Rick Browne

Red Squirrels

by Rick Browne

I first began controlling grey squirrels in the 1990s. Then there were many red squirrels spread all around the Duddon Catchment from Millom to Hardknott, Kirkby to Coniston and beyond. The deadly squirrel pox— carried asymptotically by competing invading grey squirrels—decimated the red populations, leaving just a few isolated pockets. These have also been impacted by large scale conifer tree felling [especially larch due to disease].

Over the past five years there has been a big increase in grey management, thanks to many more volunteers trapping and shooting. National organisations have also encouraged this due to the huge numbers of trees damaged or killed by grey squirrels. Without the work of the volunteer squirrel groups, Red squirrels would now be all but extinct in England.

Pine martens have been reintroduced to Cumbria from Scotland to augment the small native population. As a result of this combined management, last year saw a noticeable increase in Red squirrel sightings within the

Above: red squirrel feeding station in Duddon woodland

Duddon Catchment. We have several photos and videos of Reds and pine martens visiting feeders. We need to maintain this momentum.

The best time to control greys is April to July. If you are not already involved, and would like to help in some way, please contact me. We particularly need help in the Millom area.



Stephen Leece

Mink Update

We have 5 mink raft traps deployed. Only one mink has been caught. There have been very few reports of sightings. There is a new Cumbria wide mink control project starting soon. We will be part of this and will double the number of rafts deployed. Anyone who is interested in helping manage these, please contact Rick Browne.



Above: mink raft. Below: clay pad with footprints



James Pennefather

Above: Natterjack toad

Natterjack toads

Natterjacks had a very good breeding season in 2025 all around the Cumbrian coastal sites. Thousands of toadlets emerged at Haverigg and Roanhead and hundreds at Kirkby in Furness.

It is not all good news however as there are gaps in the area where Natterjacks are no longer present. Work is ongoing on ponds at Hodbarrow. The Ironworks, Green Road, and Foxfield to try to encourage toads to return. Acoustic monitors have been deployed at several sites to listen for Natterjack calling. These are more efficient as humans can not be there all the time. Let us hope these pick up calling.

There have already been thousands of tadpoles hatched at Haverigg a month earlier than usual. There has also been calling at Kirkby. We need regular rainfall through May and June to maintain water levels in the ponds.



River Duddon Pre-history by Jan Bridget, Chair of Millom and District Local History Society

The Duddon foreshore at Millom is one of only ten sites in England where prehistoric footprints of humans and animals have been found in mudflats. Only two have been found on the east coast, another one in Jersey and the remainder on the west coast: three in south Wales, one in north Wales, another at Formby Point near Liverpool, the ninth on Walney Island and the tenth, here, on the Duddon foreshore in Millom.

The footprints – visible after particularly high tides and storms which erode the sand/sand dunes to reveal outcrops of mudflats – would have been visible for many years. But it was only in 2017 that local historian, Duane Farren, identified them as ancient footprints. Duane contacted archaeologists who confirmed the footprints were likely prehistoric.

The reason we know some of them are prehistoric is because of the many aurochs footprints Duane found – the aurochs was a huge, ferocious, cow that died out in Britain in the Bronze Age due to over hunting (it died out in Poland in the 17th century).

We have evidence of humans living in caves on the Furness peninsula and we know hunter gatherers moved around searching for food. In the warmer

months of the year they may have preferred the coastal areas (easier to walk on bare-footed), and in particular estuaries where fresh water was available and which were rich in seafood, birds eggs, wild plants, deer, wild boar, aurochs as well as hazel nuts, seeds and seasonal berries from further inland. They would have made their way along the fertile coast. In prehistoric times the Duddon estuary would have looked very different – it would have been fertile with scrub, woodland and fen carr, ideal places for animals to find food and for humans to hunt the animals for food, and to use their bones for tools and their hides for clothing and to make shelters.

The footprints formed when the weather was warm and the water low enough for reed beds and mudflats to dry and harden – having caught the impressions of whatever had walked over them. Mudflats consist of mud and peat (which can be dated). Peat formed in estuaries when the conditions were water-logged and lacked oxygen and where organic matters from reed beds or saltmarsh vegetation accumulated quicker than it decomposed.

This process was repeated over thousands of years, trapping sediments and plant material to form thick, organic-rich layers which held the footprints. We know from research carried out at Formby by Dr. Alison Burns at Manchester University, that the Formby footprints date from Mesolithic to Medieval times and it is likely this is the case for Millom too, although at the moment we only have the evidence of the aurochs to date our footprints.

There are several layers of mudflats from different periods which are revealed over time – at some point they will vanish completely, all the more reason we have to be grateful that Duane Farren monitored them.

When Duane died suddenly in March 2025, Millom and District Local History Society organised a tribute to him. Whilst organising this, his wife, Sharon, gave the Society seven folders with photographs of the footprints which the Society scanned and put up on our website. A few weeks later, Sharon found two memory sticks with over 800 photographs – an incredible and fascinating archive. The photographs were taken in 2017-18. The History Society have published *The Prehistoric Footprints of Millom*, which is dedicated to Duane. It tells the story of how Duane found the footprints and places them in historical context but most of all, shares some of the amazing

images. Dr. Burns helped to identify the different animal footprints and has the following to say:

These photos are a remarkable record of past activity within a now submerged prehistoric intertidal marshland. Duane has captured the rich diversity of species present at various times. The wolf and aurochs prints are particularly fascinating as they represent species no longer found in the British Isles. The wild boar hoof prints are also a rare find. Much like the records from Formby Point further south, Duane's photos vividly show the movement of several species on the mudflats, all navigating the marshes on the same day.

This remarkable documentation gives us a glimpse into the thriving coastal populations that existed before the advent of farming Duane's dedicated work has added a valuable archive to the history of Millom, and it undoubtedly warrants further research to enhance our understanding of prehistoric life in Northern England.

The book is available, £10, from Frame-It and Millom Heritage and Arts Centre, Millom, Tourist Information Centre, Broughton-in-Furness and Suttons bookshop in Ulverston. It was reviewed in the April 2026 edition of **Cumbria Life**. The proceeds go to the History Society for further research.

The History Society are setting up a monitoring group to continue Duane's work and hope to find out more about the footprints by utilising radiocarbon dating. Unfortunately, this is very expensive so funding is required. We would love a university to get involved.

More information is available on our website, www.millomhistory.org.uk.



Pam Pennefather

Himalayan Balsam

In 2025 we cleared approx. a quarter of a million plants! I feel we have the Duddon and Lickle river banks under control. However, we will still need to monitor these 7 areas this year and remove all plants before any seed is released.

Buckman Bottom should be easier this year because the landowner has agreed to mow the worst areas in late June before seeding. This should give us the opportunity to clear all remaining plants before seeding occurs. The newly discovered area at Thwaite Yeat should be manageable now we know about it and the farmers are going to help.

Nick has acquired some funding and purchased 2 brushcutters, protective helmets/visors and hand flails. These will enable us to clear bad areas much more efficiently. There is also funding to employ a contractor with a tractor mounted hedge flail to clear the severely infested field boundaries at Hillbrow. We will not be able to count plants so accurately but it is more important to ensure we clear the areas before seeding occurs.

Monitoring will commence in late May so if anyone wants to claim an area to monitor, please contact me. I can then co ordinate volunteers more efficiently. Last year, plants were still flowering and making seed till late September, so please prepare yourselves for a long season.

SUSTAINABLE DUDDON

Introducing Sustainable Duddon

Do you know who Sustainable Duddon is, or what we do? If not, here's a quick introduction.

Sustainable Duddon began in 2020 as a local initiative focused on raising awareness of environmental issues within the Duddon Parish. The early campaign generated strong interest and enthusiasm, helping the group grow from a parish-led project into an independent charity.

Today, Sustainable Duddon works across the wider Duddon catchment, bringing together communities, organisations, and individuals who share an interest in protecting and enhancing our local environment. Our aim is simple: to support practical action that benefits nature, the climate and the people who live here.

Working in Partnership

Collaboration is central to our work. We work with local organisations through an informal partnership called the Duddon Catchment Partnership, these include Duddon Rivers Association, South Lakes Red Squirrel Group, and South Cumbria Rivers Trust.

By working together, we are able to share knowledge, resources, and expertise, allowing us to deliver more effective and wide-ranging projects across the area.

Our Website and Community Connections

Over the past year, we have secured support from Copeland Community Fund and We Are Digital to develop our website: www.sustainableduddon.co.uk

The site provides an overview of the projects we are involved in, as well as highlighting the work of our partners. While it is not a complete list of everything happening in the area, it offers a useful insight into the range of activity taking place across the Duddon catchment.

We are keen for the website to reflect the wider community. If you are part of a local group or business and would like to contribute information,

Below: The new website for Sustainable Duddon

**SUSTAINABLE
DUDDON**

About Us Climate & Nature Projects Discover Duddon Contact Donate Volunteer

9.9°C Temp C 49.9°F Temp F 3 Wind Speed 3.6mm Rainfall today 40.2mm Rainfall month

A Jewel in the Crown of the Lake District

Discover

We Are Sustainable Duddon

Sustainable Duddon is a charitable incorporated organisation working to protect and enhance the natural environment of the Duddon catchment and estuary. Formed in 2021 following the success of the Greening Campaign, we bring people together to share knowledge, take action on climate change, and create a more sustainable future for our community. We became a registered charity in April 2024 (Charity No. 1208017) with a clear purpose: to conserve the environment, use resources wisely, and promote sustainability for the benefit of all.

Learn More

updates, or images, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Sharing Wildlife Through Video

We have recently launched a YouTube channel, Sustainable Duddon, which acts as a home for footage collected from wildlife cameras across the Duddon area. These clips offer a fascinating glimpse into local biodiversity and help bring our work to life, so please have a look, sign up, like and share.

If you have your own wildlife camera footage and would like to share, please get in touch via the contact details on our website.

Tackling Invasive Species

We have received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and CGP Trust to support the removal of invasive species, with a particular focus on Himalayan balsam.

This funding has enabled us to purchase equipment for two volunteer teams of ten, including protective clothing, First Aid kits and specialist tools. The work is being delivered in close collaboration with the Duddon Rivers Association and will strengthen ongoing efforts to control this invasive plant.

Throughout the year, we will be organising community workdays, normally Sunday mornings for 1-2 hours, offering opportunities for anyone interested to get involved and make a practical contribution plus a good workout!

Projects That Evolve

One of the most interesting aspects of our work is how projects often develop in unexpected ways. For example, we initially acquired acoustic monitors to record Natterjack toads. These devices also proved effective for recording bats, providing over thirty thousand recordings. Analysis of the recordings then suggested the presence of a Greater White-toothed Shrew, an invasive, non-native species which are quite rare. To validate the shrew existing, we are now collecting Barn Owl pellets, as the shrews are a tasty snack, for further study. This project highlights the



Above: screen grab of one of the videos taken by our wildlife cameras of a red deer stag

interconnected nature of wildlife, demonstrating a single initiative can lead to valuable new discoveries

Other Local Projects

In addition to river-focused work, Sustainable Duddon is also exploring a range of wider sustainability initiatives. These include community energy opportunities, thermal imaging to improve energy efficiency in homes, and support for the BEAT (Barrow to Esk Active Travel) project.

The BEAT project is working alongside the Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Trust to explore the development of a coastal route, helping to promote sustainable, active travel and improve local connectivity.

Get Involved

Sustainable Duddon is built on community involvement, and there are many ways to take part. Whether you are interested in volunteering, sharing information, or supporting local environmental projects, we would love to hear from you.

To find out more, visit our website or get in touch directly by emailing sustainableduddon@gmail.com. Together, we can make a positive and lasting difference to the Duddon catchment.



Update from the Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery Project

We're now nearly a year into the implementation phase of the project.

Some highlights so far include:

- Phase 1 of our peatland restoration has been completed at Black Hall Farm, Phase 2 is being planned
- work has started at our new community tree nursery, volunteers welcome
- larch has been felled at Hardknott Forest, and using our own peeler pointer we've manufactured 100's of fence posts for the local farms. A great example of conservation, farming and forestry working together
- our volunteering and schools programme has expanded and we recently welcomed a class from Broughton Primary for the first time

To find out more anyone is welcome to attend our site tours/open days on Sunday 12th July or Tuesday 28th July.

There will be easy and moderate versions of the walk, and we will cover some highlights of the first year of the project, with plenty of time for questions.

These events, plus others such as our dawn chorus walk, drystone walling days and regular volunteer dates are all on our website.

Contact Information

John Hodgson (Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery Volunteering and Engagement Manager)

Email: j.h.hodgson@leeds.ac.uk

mob: 07866218781

Useful Links

Newsletter sign up [here](#).

Volunteering page [here](#).

UDLR website [here](#).

Restoring Hardknott Forest website [here](#).

Socialmedia: [Instagram](#), [Bluesky](#), [Facebook](#), [Threads](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#).

Support our tree nursery appeal [here](#).





DRA Annual Summer Social Event 2026

**A guided walk and talk by John Hodgson around the
Restoring Hardknott Forest Project
Everyone is welcome!**



**Monday 13th July
at 10am**

**Meet at Hardnott forest car park, just up the road
from the old birks bridge
(What3words: outbound.upper.useful)**

The 2 hr guided walk will be followed by a BYO picnic (weather permitting), after which those who wish can visit the Newfield Inn at Seathwaite for a drink and a catchup.

Please email duddonriverassociation@gmail.com to confirm your attendance.
Made with PosterMyWall.com



Get involved with DRA volunteering events

We are using our project-based WhatsApp groups to organise volunteer sessions from everything from tree planting to water monitoring. Please join the groups for the activities you are interested in and you will be able to keep up to date with what's going on. See page 3 for details on how to join the groups.

Restoring Hardknott Forest events

Wildlife events and volunteer days are run regularly at Hardknott Forest. Booking and more information can be found [here](#) or by scanning the QR code.

SCRT events

SCRT conduct many activities in our catchment including tree planting, leaky dam building, electrofishing and riverfly surveys and training days.

Register as a SCRT volunteer using 'Better Impact' by clicking [here](#) or see the SCRT website for event details: www.scrt.co.uk/events

DRA is part of South Cumbria Rivers Trust. SCRT is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee. Company Registration No: 5763380. It is a registered charity: No. 1114682. Registered office: Penny Bridge Hall Estate Office, The Lodge, Penny Bridge, Ulverston. Cumbria, LA12 7RJ.

DIARY DATES

JUNE

Sat 13th 1.30 - 4pm Thwaites Gala
Please pop over to the DRA stand and say hello!

JULY

Mon 13th 10.00am DRA Summer Social Event: Guided Walk at Hardknott Forest
Join us for a two hour guided walk and talk by John Hodgson followed by a BYO picnic (weather permitting). Drinks at the Newfield Inn afterwards for those who want a chance to catch up. (See page 13 for details)

AUGUST

Sat 29th 9am - 5pm Broughton & Millom Agricultural Show
Can you volunteer to help on our stand for a couple of hours?

Duddon River Association details

Chair: Rick Browne (mob: 07712 252753)

Secretary: Steve Benn

Social Media: Jackie Lancaster

Newsletter: Sian Jeffreys

Events: Joshua Caulcott-Cooper

Email: duddonriverassociation@gmail.com

Instagram: @duddonriverassociation

Facebook: [duddonriverassociation](https://www.facebook.com/duddonriverassociation)

Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/duddonriverassociation

