

Penny French's Stockbridge Reserve

I have been a member of BOG since 2010, living locally to Stockbridge Reserve. It was the evocative sound of geese flying overhead through the dark that drew me to the Group. I didn't know where the geese were landing but knew it was close.

Fortunately, I met someone who said to look near St Mary's School on a Sunday morning. I did and was signed up to become a BOG member.

I can remember the first time I went down to the Reserve, a busy Saturday in Riddlesden when the Gala was blocking the roads and crowds of people making a din.

I entered the school gates and found what I call "the magic garden". An oasis of peacefulness, I just sat on the grass in front of the hide, it was warm and very sunny due to being south facing. I couldn't believe my luck, all to myself a whole reserve.

Within a short space of time, a Kingfisher came and perched on a line in front of me, looking over the water, it plunged and caught a fish and returned to its perch. Then it threw the fish in the air to position it ready for swallowing and the bird remained there for some time.

Although it's not a huge Reserve, Stockbridge provides a beautiful quiet environment where you can have complete peace, also a hide to escape the weather even if David Lindo might turn up!

An experience I enjoyed was when a Sparrowhawk tried to fly through the hide window! I have watched Grey Herons fishing for frogs in the reed bed, Goosanders breeding in the Stock Dove nest box along with views of Roe Deer and Fox.

Blackcaps have sung in the spring whilst Mallards congregate during evening roosts. It amazes me that this all happens so close to the middle of Keighley.

Since the Reserve was established in 1992, there have been many members who have contributed time and effort to undertake the necessary work required. Being a small wetland, willow is always a dominant tree which would snuff out other plants. The reed bed also needs attention every year but I have enjoyed helping out when I can. It is impossible not to have a feeling of improved health by just being at Stockbridge Reserve, listening to the sounds of nature and watching birds flying over, especially if you have a rake or clippers in your hand! Seeing the seasons change, witnessing how the Reserve benefits so many species. Situated next to the River Aire, it is positioned in a corridor through the valley.

So well done everyone who has contributed to date and "come on down" those that have yet to experience it!

I am passionate about Stockbridge Reserve. I want to see it continue with bee hives, the islands restored, more support for those few who work regularly there and make decisions so that the Reserve has a future, for the sake of the birds, nature and our wellbeing. It is a big responsibility but one worth taking. It is more important than ever that we have nature on our doorstep, as gardens are paved, new estates are built on green fields, we must hang on to those areas which can absorb excess water (it sometimes flood from the River Aire), offer a lifeline for nesting and overwintering birds, wetland loving plants, amphibians and the nature that calls Stockbridge Reserve home.

Penny French