MEET THE YNU

Yorkshire Naturalists' Union

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How did you get involved with the YNU?

My involvement with the YNU goes back fifty years, when my main interest was studying mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Colin Howes and the late Mike Clegg invited me to join the “Mammals and Lower Vertebrates Committee” and I had an enjoyable time looking for Harvest Mouse nests, watching Adders, catching newts and being shown hibernating bats, by some enthusiastic experts.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

I am President of the YNU for 2025. Presidents serve for one year then become Vice-Presidents for life. There is no job description for the role, but I have set myself the task of attending all five annual “Excursions” (major field meetings in each of the five vice-counties), meeting as many members and Affiliated Societies as possible and providing a series of lectures and identification workshops.

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

You get to meet some friendly enthusiasts with specialist knowledge, always happy to help. You also get to see some great places in Yorkshire, attend some enjoyable meetings, contribute your records to increase our knowledge of the county, and receive some excellent publications! I would encourage all naturalists to get involved with the YNU, as a full member or as a member of one of the Affiliated Societies.

DEREK WHITELEY, 2025 PRESIDENT

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

Nowadays my main interests are various invertebrate groups particularly hoverflies and other popular Diptera families. I had just started a job at Sheffield Museum in 1975, and my boss sent me out with a net to catch local flies to build up a local collection. Hardly anything was known about flies in Sheffield in those days. My specimens were identified by the late Peter Skidmore who was YNU Recorder for Diptera. Over the years I have learned to identify a range of species, and I like to encourage the next generation of dipterists by running identification workshops.

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you’ve seen in our region?

I grew up in Sheffield and have lived in the Peak District for 30 years. Four years ago we moved to Wensleydale. I am now happiest when I am out exploring in the Yorkshire Dales and recording flies and other invertebrates. All the better if I am sharing experiences with other naturalists. I also enjoy getting home and entering my observations to iRecord, over a nice cup of Yorkshire tea. When I am back in the Peak, a winter walk on the moors to watch white Mountain Hares takes some beating.

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How did you get involved with the YNU?

I joined in the late 1980s because both Simon (husband) and I strongly felt we should support our county's senior natural history society and also realised we could learn SO much from many of the key players, who were/are national experts in their field.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

I volunteered as the Publicity Officer for the 150th anniversary in 2011 – I wanted to maximise the publicity for YNU during that momentous year which I think boosted membership well! I continued in that role for several subsequent years. Next, I became Secretary of the Birds Section – convening meetings and supporting the Recorder, Craig Thomas. I also became sub-editor of the YNU Bird Report from 2006 to 2015 (that was some task!). I'm now honoured to be sitting on the YNU Executive as a trustee. My husband Simon was President of YNU in 2016 and was the catalyst for the YNU Conference about mineral sites and their value for wildlife.

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

Meeting members from all over the county at field meetings/the AGM and also shadowing experts in subjects about which I know little and hoping to learn more about our wonderful wildlife. The YNU is blessed with many national experts and they are very willing to share their knowledge with those of us who are keen to learn!

JILL WARWICK, YNU TRUSTEE

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

Birds (am a senior bird ringer and co-founder of the East Dales Ringing Group in 1996) and also moths (started recording them in 1984) and I have been the Macro-recorder for the Harrogate Naturalists' Society for over ten years.

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you've seen in our region?

Of course, it's Nosterfield Local Nature Reserve and environs – the reserve/Lower Ure Conservation Trust was set up by Simon in 1996 and the volunteer team there were awarded the prestigious King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS – equivalent to an MBE) in Nov 2024 for what has been achieved!

A favourite bird species has to be Whooper Swan – their far-carrying and evocative call is just so magical! For moths, it has to be my first Yorkshire-caught Clifden Nonpareil at Welwick in September 2024.

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How did you get involved with the YNU?

I've been a member of the affiliated Sorby Natural History Society for around 20 years and made use of Sorby and YNU specialists for help with identifying things and general advice. Then attended a YNU conference around 5 years ago and became a member at the same time. I've since enjoyed attending the vice county excursions, reading things like The Naturalist journal and made further use of expertise in the YNU. A friend, Phil Whelpdale, was already a trustee of YNU and suggested that I might be a good person to also be a trustee, and so I became one in 2023.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

As a trustee I attend a few meetings of the executive each year and try to make it to as many of the vice county excursions as I can (being right at the southern boundary of Yorkshire I can't make it to the further away outings very often). As a small charity it doesn't take up lots of my time, but I enjoy hearing about what other people are up to around Yorkshire, and helping to determine who we fund through the grant scheme we run.

Not necessarily as a trustee, but just a general member of the YNU, I like to write up some of my findings from surveys and research in The Naturalist and try to share interesting information through the Newsletter. I enjoy reading about other people's work, so hopefully others also enjoy mine (and more contributions from a wider audience are welcome).

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

I often wondered in the past why the YNU is called a Union, when other groups are Naturalists' or Natural History Societies, but the way the YNU brings people together from across Yorkshire is an important function, and the main reason I'm a member. I am very happy being out in the wilds on my own looking at wildlife, but sometimes I need some company, some help or guidance. Other members of the YNU are the reason I'm a member and that I try to contribute to its continued running. The often-informal learning opportunities or making connections that you can then follow up via email or other means, is a vital way I've learnt so much about the natural history of Yorkshire.

JIM HORSFALL, YNU TRUSTEE

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

I first joined Sorby Natural History Society around 20 years ago to learn about fungi, and although I still look for fungi my interests have broadened over the years. I am now mainly a botanist and assist the VC63 county recorders with processing plant records, but have also gathered interests in water beetles, bees, soldierflies, moths and more! I have recorded well over 2,000 species in the UK (mostly in Yorkshire) and continue to look for new things all the time.

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you've seen in our region?

Having grown up in Cononley in Airedale this is a place I like to visit, and it being under recorded almost everything is 'new' to the species list of the area. But I work for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust managing nature reserves in South Yorkshire, so many of these are my most frequently visited places, my office is at Potteric Carr, but I also visit Sprotbrough Flash, Brockadale and Maltby Low Common frequently, all of which are interesting and full of wildlife.

I don't have a favourite species, but what I like to appreciate is how species (especially plants) grow together in communities. My increasing interest in invertebrates complements this, as many of the more interesting species are specific to a plant, or the conditions associated with a plant community. Although I didn't set out to be an ecologist (in the true sense of the word – looking at where things grow and how they interact) this is what I find most fascinating.

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How did you get involved with the YNU?

I joined the YNU after, as a student at Leeds University, I attended a meeting of the Entomological Section held in the Zoology faculty lecture theatre.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

I took over the role of Odonata Recorder from John Flint in the late 1970s, and the role of Hemiptera Recorder soon after; over 55 years as a Recorder; I became Secretary of the Entomological Section in 2017 and currently remain in post.

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

The Entomological Section meetings, in particular the opportunity to meet and talk to those with entomological interests.

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

Specialising in taxonomy and ways of identifying the dragonflies, lacewings and their allies, true land and water bugs, plant hoppers and their kin, and psyllids (jumping plant lice). Exploring little known insect groups initially attracted me to these groups of insects. I continue to discover new and undescribed species and contribute to the wider understanding of them.

STUART FOSTER, ENTOMOLOGICAL SECTION SECRETARY

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you've seen in our region?

I do not have a favourite site, but Yorkshire offers so many rich and varied habitats to study, and they are on my doorstep. With regard to favourite species, it must be *Brachycarenus tigrinus*, new to Britain with a taste for my kitchen window; I had only previously found this bug in swimming pools in Mallorca.

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How did you get involved with the YNU?

Due to my invertebrate research as an amateur, I made connections with various prominent members of the YNU during the mid to late 1980s, and subsequently became a member of the YNU, probably about 1990.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

I have been in my role as Diptera Recorder (for most families of Diptera) for 30 years (since 1995), taking over from Peter Skidmore, who also held the role for a 30-year period (1965 to 1995). Being a recorder for such a large group as the Diptera, it is inevitable that a lot of correspondence is received from various other members of the YNU, and others interested in Diptera from throughout Britain. The various correspondence (usually via email nowadays) generally amounts to more that I can cope with, but I always try to help as much as possible, and I answer all queries - eventually! Although there are no set obligations to submit occasional papers on Yorkshire Diptera for publication in The Naturalist, nor to upkeep records; there is, of course, a general expectation that such will be done as and when time permits.

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

Despite it entailing a huge amount of time and work, I enjoy dealing with data and making identifications far more so than writing reports, which can seem like a drag at times once a mental block has occurred. For me, however, the most enjoyable part of membership of the YNU is definitely the relaxed social aspect such as occurs at the section meetings, AGMs and themed conferences.

ANDREW GRAYSON
DIPTERA RECORDER

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

My invertebrate-interests are very broad, but my specialisms are in various families of Diptera. I am generally drawn to families of flies that are little-studied, but for which good identification works are available.

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you've seen in our region?

There are so many interesting sites and species within our region, that I could not pick any particular favourites!

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Yorkshire Naturalists' Union

How did you get involved with the YNU?

I had heard of the YNU shortly after I arrived in the county to study for my MSc in Biodiversity & Conservation at the University of Leeds (in 1999). I joined shortly after buying our first house and being able to set up my microscope and office in the small bedroom, allowing me to start a focussed effort on recording arachnids (spiders & harvestmen) in the county, recognising that my records would be useful to the society as well as the national recording society administered by the British Arachnological Society.

How long have you been in your role, and what does it entail?

Colin Howes recommended me to be the YNU's spider recorder in the autumn of 2009, which I was only too happy to accept, considering it an honour to represent the society in this capacity. I had already started to record at a few locations such as Potteric Carr, near Doncaster and an urban nature reserve (Rodley, Leeds) near where I used to live. This also allowed me to review spider recording in Yorkshire which soon introduced me to the sterling efforts of Clifford Smith, an earlier predecessor.

My role is honorary, but I am very fortunate to work as an applied entomologist, which includes working in various locations nationally but including Yorkshire. So, I get to record spiders and other invertebrates in a wide range of habitats, environments and localities, not all of which are typically visited by the amateur naturalist. I also welcome records from a few individuals based in the county, and more recently, act as a verifier on the iRecord platform for all of Yorkshire's five vice-counties.

My most recent achievement has been the writing and production, updating Clifford Smith's privately published Atlas of Yorkshire Spiders (in March 1982). This is being published in October 2025 and includes for the first time, the 26 species of harvestmen, in addition to the 430 species of spider. The work describes the fauna in the county in the context of habitats and environments, as well as individual species distribution maps.

What part of your role or membership of the YNU do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy many aspects of the role. In addition to the recording and regular submission of articles describing my and fellow naturalists' recording efforts in the county, when I can find the time around work and family commitments, going on the field excursions and meeting other recorders, knowing I am playing a part in furthering the long-standing exploration of the county's flora and fauna. I try and make one excursion a year.

RICHARD WILSON

ARNEAE, OPILIONES & PSEUDOSCORPIONES

What is your specialism/area of interest and what drew you to it?

Spiders & harvestmen (did I mention I have written a book?) are my primary interest which developed from my teenage years when I was living in Bedfordshire. Professionally, I study a wider range of invertebrates, primarily beetles, bugs, flies and the 'stinging' bees and wasps.

Do you have a favourite site to visit in Yorkshire, or a favourite species you've seen in our region?

I have made a special effort to record in the Yorkshire Dales, and especially within the upland environments. There has been a focus, a small money-spider called Semljicola caliginosus. It was originally described by the YNU's first spider recorder, William Falconer from specimens collected in May 1909 from Marsden Moor, above Huddersfield and given the name Eboria caliginosa, which can be translated as 'Yorkshire's cloud-living' spider. It was subsequently transferred to the genus Semljicola (pronounced Sem..ji..cola) and lost the reference to Yorkshire. The species is still extant in the county, Yorkshire being the southernmost location in Britain (and I think globally) where it occurs.