

GRIMSARGH WETLANDS

NEWS

SPRING 2021

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SPRING2021

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Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

At the time of writing, we are in our third period of 'lock-down' and our lives continue to be severely restricted. We are all encouraged to undertake exercise locally and, in this context, a visit to the Wetlands is ideal for anyone who lives in the village. As always, we would encourage visitors to observe all regulations and recommendations regarding social distancing and meeting with members of other households.

Spring is an ideal time to visit the Wetlands. February and March see many Curlew roosting on the Wetlands with dawn or dusk being the best times to see large numbers of this internationally threatened species. Trust Chair, David Hindle has recently highlighted the Wetlands as a regionally important site for Curlew and we are privileged to be able to observe Curlew, locally, in such large numbers.

The work of the Trust continues to be severely disrupted as a consequence of the pandemic. Nonetheless, there have been a number of exciting developments over the last few months and we hope you enjoy reading about them here.

We all, of course, hope for a return to a more 'normal' life in the summer, and beyond, and we particularly look forward to re-establishing our volunteer and community activities at the earliest opportunity. There is a lot to be done!

With best wishes,

The Trustees.



Review of Wetlands

**BIRD
SIGHTINGS
2020**

Clearly, 2020 was a difficult year for recording bird and other wildlife sightings. During periods of 'lockdown', people have been subject to a range of travel restrictions preventing them visiting some of their favourite recording sites. Additionally, ornithological and other wildlife organisations have closed sites, halted formal recording programmes and embargoed sighting data. At the very least, publicity regarding unusual or rare sightings, that may have encouraged people to travel or gather together in any form of 'twitch', has been actively discouraged. Having said that, there has been an undeniable boom in 'local patch' birdwatching/recording as part of daily exercise regimes and, as a consequence, it is still possible to put together a comprehensive review of Wetlands birdlife in 2020.

As always, observations of local birdlife are most appropriately recorded on the ELOC website (East Lancashire Ornithologists' Club (<https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/index.aspx>)) and we thank all those who have taken time to record their observations in this way. As ever, these records only provide a 'snapshot' of birdlife on the Wetlands; however, the records are revealing. Some of the key highlights for 2020 are listed below.



▲ Male Goosander on the Wetlands (photograph by Richard Moss).

1. Over eighty different species were recorded during 2020, ranging from the tiny Goldcrest to an, all too brief, appearance by a Great White Egret at the beginning of April. One noteworthy addition to the list was the Kingfisher – a bird that has often seemed elusive on a site that should, perhaps, be ideal for it.
2. Large numbers of feral geese were, again, routinely counted on, and around the Wetlands, with a group of 96 Greylag Goose reported in April and 110 Canada Goose reported in February. Disappointingly, there were reports of only a single Pink-footed Goose among the resident geese; however, on a number of occasions, large numbers of these geese were reported over-flying the Wetlands.
3. The highest Lapwing count was an impressive 247 in August (compared with 310 in 2019). In contrast, the numbers of other wading species were, again, disappointing.

A small group (up to 7) of Black-tailed Godwit was recorded in April along with similar numbers of Little Ringed Plover. Smaller numbers of Avocet, Redshank, a single Greenshank and a single Ringed Plover were seen in April and May. The maximum number of Oystercatcher (5) was very disappointing compared with counts from recent years. On a more positive note, a pair of Oystercatchers did appear to successfully raise offspring. Only a single Common Sandpiper was seen, periodically, during the year; however, a small group (2-3) of Green Sandpiper (along with lone Dunlin and Grey Plover) were extremely welcome visitors during the Autumn months.



▲ Green Sandpiper on the Wetlands (photograph by Gerry Small).

4. The numbers of Curlew and Whimbrel roosting on the Wetlands remain impressive. The highest count of roosting Curlew was 120 in March and the largest recorded roosting group of Whimbrel was 75 in April.
5. The population of ducks on the Wetlands continues to flourish. There was a truly astounding count of 500 Mallard in late December. This large number probably reflected the supplementation of the resident Wetlands population with visiting ducks seeking refuge from the large number of pre-Christmas shoots that were taking place at the time.

There were also impressive numbers of other ducks: 50 Teal, 40 Tufted Duck, 21 Shoveler, 18 Gadwall, 9 Shelduck, 8 Goldeneye, 7 Pochard and 7 Wigeon were recorded at various times during 2020.

6. A group of 8 Little Grebe was recorded in September; however, there were no sightings of the, perhaps, more familiar Great-crested Grebe. A group of up to 18 Goosander were seen in January.

Alongside the, always healthy, numbers of Coot (16 in September) and Moorhen (8 in September) there was considerable excitement at reports of a Water Rail, first seen in December by Warden Ken Maylor on one of his regular walks around the Wetlands. What was particularly remarkable about this sighting was that, on at least one occasion, the bird was seen in the open water of the Island Lake. The Water Rail, a member of the same family as Coot and Moorhen, is normally a very secretive bird that can be incredibly difficult to see as it skulks around reed-beds. It is certainly a bird that is often heard rather than seen and Ken's sighting was a real bonus for the Wetlands.

7. Of the summer visitors (Swallow, Swift, Sand Martin and House Martin), the highlights were the counts of House Martin (15) and Sand Martin (20) in May. Small numbers of warblers (Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff) were also recorded throughout the Spring and Summer months. Given the large areas of the site suitable for warblers, but inaccessible to observers, recorded numbers are undoubtedly significant under-estimates of the true summer populations.
8. Finally, it is worth mentioning that among the, often, large numbers of Black-headed Gull seen on the Wetlands (220 recorded on January) small numbers (1-4) of Mediterranean Gull were periodically seen, most notably in full summer plumage in June and July.

As always, we continue to encourage you all to record your observations of Wetlands birdlife on the ELOC website or, alternatively, on the Wetlands Facebook page. The more records we have, the better we can gauge the impact of the work being undertaken on the long-term populations of birds on the site. This is particularly important now, in the light of our recent work aimed at improving the attractiveness of the site to wading birds.



▲ Some of the many Mallard seen on the Wetlands during the winter months (photograph by Richard Moss).



▼ Some of the numerous Black-headed Gulls often seen on the Wetlands (photograph by Gerry Small).

RE-PROFILING THE ISLANDS IN THE ISLAND LAKE

As mentioned before, a significant amount of work was carried out on the Island Lake over the winter months. The work was detailed in the last newsletter; however, it is worth updating you on the immediate outcome of that work. Specifically, recent photographs taken by drone photographer Mark Ashmore and regular Wetlands photographer Gerry Small show that, when the water level is close to the winter maximum, there is very little height to the islands. In addition, the lengths and complexity of the island perimeters (or 'coastlines') have been dramatically increased. Additionally, all scrub has been removed from the islands.

The intention is to ensure that, by a combination of regular maintenance work and periodic gentle flooding of the islands, there is no significant re-growth of scrub. As explained before, it is anticipated that these changes will make the islands much more attractive to wading birds.

Of course, it is possible that wind and wave action will further alter the characteristics of the islands and, as a consequence, limited remedial work may need to be undertaken in the future. The recent work did include the careful placement of rubble and concrete blocks to act as 'wave breaks' so, hopefully, the integrity of the re-profiled islands will be retained.



▲ Snow covered island in the frozen Island Lake (photograph by Gerry Small).

RECENT FUNDING SUCCESS



We are delighted to announce that the Trust has been successful in obtaining further funding from the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF - www.lancsenfund.org.uk). An award of £10,980 was made in support of our project 'Opening up the Fen'. Project Leader Geoff Carefoot explains the aims of the project as follows. "The project is based on opening up viewing opportunities (for the public) and increasing biodiversity in the 'Fen', the reservoir that was drained and is currently covered with damp willow scrub. Specifically, a public access point will be opened up at our eastern access gate between properties 323 and 325 Preston Road. The existing access gate will be replaced by a lockable, split pedestrian and vehicle access gate (similar to the one recently installed at the Compound). The gate will provide access, via a concessionary path, to a newly constructed viewing screen on the eastern embankment of the Fen.

The current access ramp (historically an access point for disabled anglers before the reservoirs were decommissioned) and embankment top path will be re-graded in white limestone and will be accessible to all - including those with prams, pushchairs and mobility scooters.



▲ The abandoned disabled anglers' fishing platform that will be 're-purposed' as a viewing platform.



▲ The access ramp at the eastern end of the Fen.



▲ Construction of the new screen looking into a small clearing and wildlife pond

Secure fencing will be erected to maintain the integrity of the nature reserve. Below the viewing screen, a clearing will be made in what is currently a wooded area. In addition, a shallow wildlife pond will be constructed and a feeding station will be established in order to encourage different birds to use this area."

"Furthermore, in the centre of the Fen, two additional ponds will be dug out to encourage amphibians to breed. Currently this area floods in winter and can dry out in the summer months and the new ponds will provide more stable water levels in the Fen. This, in turn will encourage mammals such as Roe Deer."

While this work on the Fen is being carried out, the opportunity is also being taken to improve viewing opportunities on the Island Lake. Firstly, a small viewing screen is being erected at the end of the Causeway portion of the public footpath across the Wetlands. This will look out onto the islands of the Island Lake. Embankment vegetation in the immediate area will be cut back in order to enhance the view for visitors. Finally, a new viewing screen, also looking out onto the Island Lake, will be constructed in the eastern corner of the northern embankment, close to the end of the public footpath and the stile leading into the surrounding fields.

One of the conditions of the LEF award was that work had to be completed before the end of May this year. To this end, contractors have been on site from the middle of February and, at the time of writing, work is, weather permitting, progressing well.

John Dewhurst at work creating a clearing and wildlife pond on the Fen. First on site was John Dewhurst of J. J. and S Dewhurst, with his digger, to clear vegetation from the ramp and embankment in the north-east corner of the Fen and then to excavate the new wildlife ponds in the base of the Fen. The new viewing screens are in the process of being constructed by McKay and Simpson (Southport) who were previously contracted to construct the new viewing area in the Compound.



▲ Map showing new/existing viewing platforms and new access point Preston Road to the Fen

As before, the new viewing screens will all incorporate a number of viewing slots at various heights. These will enable all visitors to easily observe the wildlife without causing disturbances. The screens, will, where appropriate, also feature integral gates to enable access onto the embankments for volunteers and maintenance equipment.

▼ Construction of the new screen looking into a small clearing and wildlife pond on the Fen.





NEW WETLANDS WEBSITE

During the past 12 months it has been difficult to undertake anything other than routine maintenance work on the Wetlands. Additionally, our fund-raising and community activities have, effectively, been put 'on hold'. Nonetheless, this extended 'downtime' has provided the Trust with the ideal opportunity to put a lot of thought and effort into completely revamping our 'online presence'.

Many of you will be familiar with the Trust's extremely popular and busy, community-based, Facebook page. The Trust also has a website; however, in contrast to the Facebook page, this has received little attention since the inception of the Trust.

The trustees took the decision to employ a professional web design and marketing company to completely overhaul our website. In the first instance, a group of trustees, led by treasurer, Lesley Walker, and joined by volunteer Hannah McGivern, were tasked with over-seeing the website project. We were extremely lucky to have Hannah on our team. Hannah is an experienced marketing and PR consultant and founder of HAN Communications (hancommunications.com) – a long-standing supporter and corporate sponsor of the Trust.

The team spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the websites of other wildlife organisations and nature reserves and, following this review, developed a specification for our new website. In essence, it needed to appeal to grant-giving organisations, professional bodies and potential sponsors while, at the same time, it needed to be welcoming and informative for potential visitors to the Wetlands. A particular concern was ensuring that the website conveyed the attractiveness of the Wetlands to younger visitors.

With these requirements established, we invited submissions from a range of leading web design and marketing teams and after a rigorous competitive tendering process, ID Design and Marketing (www.iddesignandmarketing.co.uk) were appointed to undertake the project.

The new website went 'live' just after Christmas and you can now view the results for yourself (www.grimsarghwetlands.org). Rather than give a comprehensive review of the features of the new website, the best approach is for you to simply explore it for yourself – we hope you enjoy your 'web experience'!

There are several points to keep in mind when you visit the website. Firstly, the website is a 'work in progress'. A number of elements of the website remain incomplete and, over the next 12 months, we will be working closely with ID Design and Marketing to develop and exploit the full potential of the website. In this context, we were particularly pleased with the decision of ID Design and Marketing to make us their 'charitable project' in recognition of the work we are doing on the Wetland.

One aspect of the website that you may be able to help us with relates to the 'Our History' pages. We would be really pleased to hear from you if you have any historical photographs of the site that you would be happy for us to use on the website. We are particularly interested in any images you may have from the days when the then 'Grimsargh Reservoirs' were still filled with water (and used for recreational activities such as sailing and angling). If you can help in any way, please do let us know (grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).



In parallel with the work on the website, we have taken the opportunity to update our other social media activities. Those of you who use the Wetlands Facebook page will undoubtedly have noticed the changes already made there. Likewise, the Wetlands Twitter account (@GrimsarghWT) has been 're-energised'.

We are indebted to Hannah McGivern who, in addition to overseeing the development of the website, is now providing invaluable support for our Facebook and Twitter activities.



Follow Us:

www.grimsarghwetlands.org

[@GrimsarghWT](https://twitter.com/GrimsarghWT)

www.facebook.com/grimsarghwetlands/

NEWS

Suez Donation

We were delighted that SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd. donated £1,250 to Grimsargh Wetlands Trust as part of their "Giving Something Back" scheme. SUEZ staff were invited to nominate charities supporting those in need in their local communities and working to improve the environment. Site Manager (Clifton Marsh LFS), Ray Walker, nominated us. This donation will be of tremendous help to us in developing the Wetlands - especially given the current difficulties regarding our own fund-raising activities. You can read the full story surrounding the award and Ray's interest in the Wetlands in the News section of our website.

Fund Raising

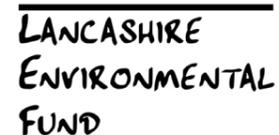
Given the current difficult circumstances, it is heartening to report that trustee Andy Small still managed to generate over £2000 in donations and sales of Christmas cards and Wetlands calendars (now all but sold out). This, despite the fact that all the local Christmas Fayres and other seasonal events were cancelled. We are particularly grateful to Blue Moon Computers (Longridge), Yorkshire Building Society, (Longridge Branch) and Premier Stores (Grimsargh Village Store) for their help in promoting and selling our calendars.

Volunteer Days and Guided Walks

These activities are currently suspended; however, if and when we are able to safely restart them, we will email you with details. You will, in future, also be able to find information about volunteering opportunities and other activities in the 'What's On' section of our website.

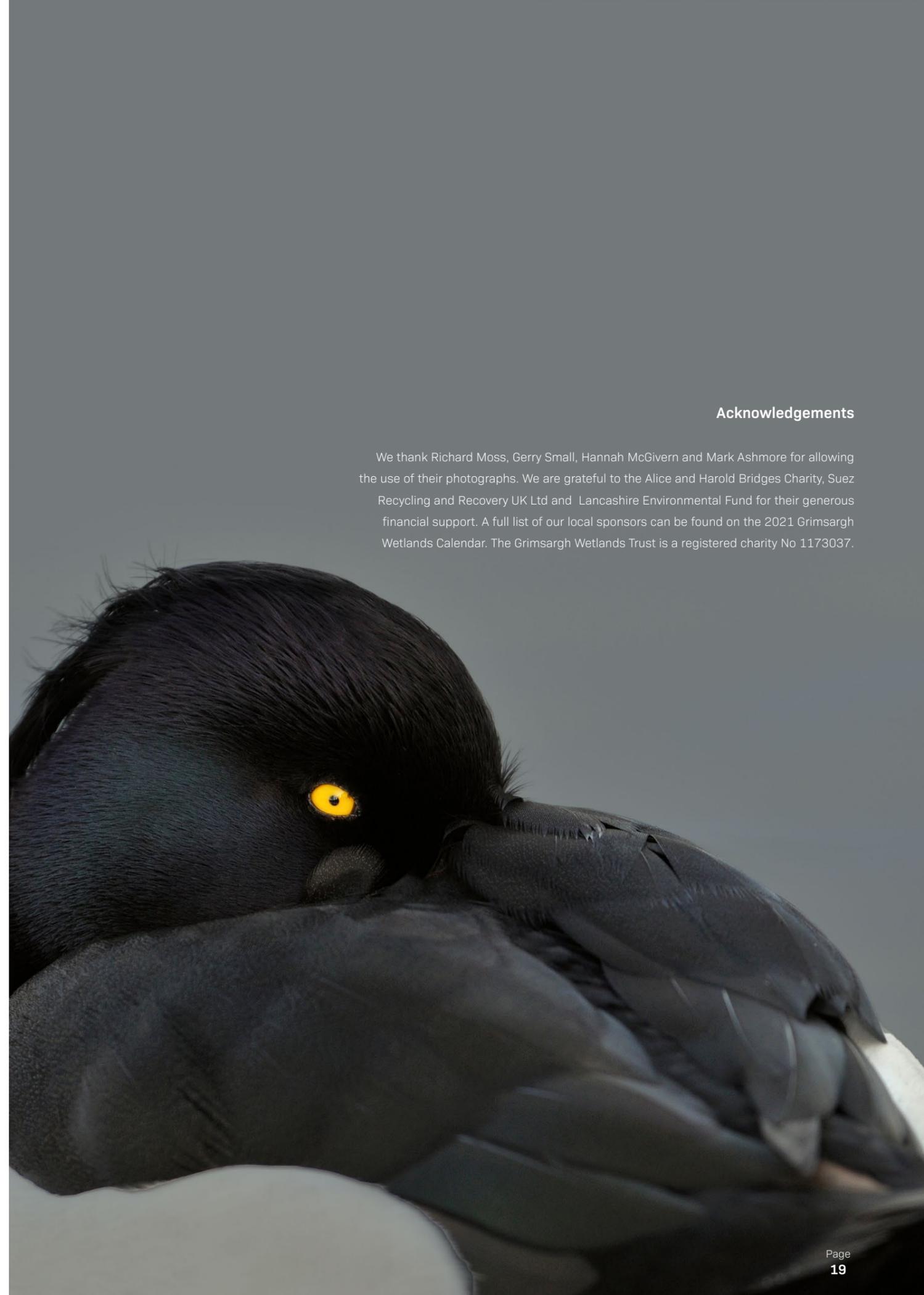
Membership information

Membership information is currently being updated in the 'Membership' section of our website. If you need to update your contact details or have any other queries about membership then you should contact Jayne Woollam (jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk).



Acknowledgements

We thank Richard Moss, Gerry Small, Hannah McGivern and Mark Ashmore for allowing the use of their photographs. We are grateful to the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity, Suez Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd and Lancashire Environmental Fund for their generous financial support. A full list of our local sponsors can be found on the 2021 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity No 1173037.





www.grimsarghwetlands.org

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