
Grimسargh Wetlands Newsletter

Summer 2020



Welcome

Dear all,

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter. Since our last newsletter, published at the beginning of March, all our hopes and plans have been overtaken by events. At the time of writing, we are all in 'lock-down' and nature reserves across the country are closed or have severely restricted access for the foreseeable future. The Wetlands is no different and the new viewing screens are currently closed to the public. The public footpath across the reserve remains open for people undertaking their permitted daily exercise; however, that pathway is extremely narrow in places and, clearly, people using the footpath do so entirely at their own risk.

The work of the Trust has, inevitably, been severely affected by the ongoing health emergency and all but the most essential security and maintenance work has been halted. Our programme of volunteer days, guided walks and fund-raising events has been suspended and will not recommence until it is safe to do so, once government restrictions are lifted.

This newsletter will, of necessity, be very different from previous ones. In line with the guidelines laid out by the British Trust for Ornithology, and other wildlife organisations, survey work has not been undertaken during the period of 'lock-down' and we are therefore unable to report on Wetlands wildlife highlights. Instead, we will take the opportunity to review the work undertaken in the relatively short time since the inception of the Trust and highlight the considerable achievements of our volunteers and supporters.

We fully appreciate that some, perhaps many, of you have been unable to visit the Wetlands, either as a consequence of the government's restrictions on travel or because you are self-isolating or subject to a shielding regime. We hope this newsletter provides you with a welcome reminder of the Wetlands and its amazing wildlife.

You can all rest assured that, as soon as it is safe to do so, full access will be restored to the Wetlands and all members of the local community will be welcome to, once again, engage with the wildlife and enjoy the peace and serenity of Grimsargh Wetlands – your local nature reserve.

With best wishes,

The Trustees

News

New Viewing Screens

We were fortunate in that work on the new viewing screens was completed just days before the imposition of government restrictions. The project was, as you know, managed by Trustee Geoff Carefoot and Geoff has taken the opportunity to reflect on our aspirations for, and the challenges of, work undertaken over the past several months. Geoff comments: *"Shortly after formation of the Grimsargh Wetlands Trust, the trustees decided upon a number of priorities to manage the site and improve the site's Biodiversity. Priorities were to begin to manage the willow scrub which was taking over the embankments of the three reservoirs and the damp interior bed of Reservoir 3 and to make safe, and improve, the public footpath across*

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part of the reserve which had fallen into disrepair and, in places, was frankly dangerous. We were fortunate in obtaining a grant from the Lancashire Environmental Fund to improve the latter and they were so impressed by our vision, and advance planning for further phases, that a further £20,000 was made available for us to open up the old compound off Preston Road, put in a ramp for access by all prospective visitors and erect viewing screens that overlooked both of the two main reservoirs.



'Breaking ground' for the new viewing screens (September, 2019).

Learning from previous experience we commenced with securing our boundary, in September 2019, principally by custom-made timber viewing screens, at the top of the embankment, constructed by McKay and Simpson, specialist fencing contractors of Southport who have the RSPB, English Nature and other conservation bodies amongst their clients. These screens have a number of viewing slots at various heights to enable visitors to easily see the wildfowl and waders on the reservoirs without disturbing them. The screens also feature three integral gates to enable groups of volunteers, visitors and equipment such as tracked wood chippers, brush mowers and mini-diggers etc. onto the embankments for regular maintenance.

This was followed up by employing John Dewhurst of J. J. and S. Dewhurst Engineering Services, with his digger, to form the long ramp up to the screens and to level off the viewing

area as well as to drag out, and dispose of, some of the waterlogged willows that were preventing good views of Reservoir 1.



Scrub and waterlogged-willow were cleared from the embankments to provide unimpeded views of the reservoirs (February, 2020).

A lot of the scrub, primarily brambles, in the compound was cleared to expose a considerable quantity of crushed limestone which was used to form the ramp without recourse to purchasing new material and having it trucked in at considerable cost. This area is to be seeded with limestone-tolerant flowers.

John was familiar with our site, having worked on it many years ago, and was very helpful regarding suggestions and solutions to problems encountered. All this in the wettest autumn and winter I can recall which severely slowed the groundwork, especially on the new pedestrian ramp and the reworked vehicular ramp up to the embankment top.

We also had Goosnargh Tree Services on site to cut down and chip much of the willow on the embankments which were restricting viewing opportunities. Some of the resulting chippings were sold and the proceeds used to replenish Trust funds.

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Goosnargh Tree Services at work clearing scrub on a cold and frosty morning (December, 2019).

We have cleared a small section of the embankment near the screens to expose the underlying masonry which shows the site's industrial heritage, coming up to 200 years old now, and forms a different micro-habitat.

I was very impressed with the 'can-do' attitude of our contractors who all did excellent work on our behalf. I am delighted that, notwithstanding challenging weather conditions over winter, we finished ahead of time and within budget...in fact we have £8.20 change!"

The trustees are delighted with the work done by our contractors and, in particular, with the professional way in which Geoff has managed the project under, often, trying conditions and our appreciation and thanks go to all concerned.

New Informational Notice Boards

In parallel with the work on the viewing screens, work has also been completed on the production of a series of new informational notice boards for the Wetlands. This has been made possible by a generous donation from the Putland family, Grimsargh for which we are extremely grateful. The boards, designed by Lynne Gorner, from 'Naturally Creative' based in Huddersfield, feature artwork by the children of Grimsargh St Michael's Primary School and Alston Lane Primary School and provide an insight into the wildlife of the Wetlands, the history of the site and its importance to the local

community. Production and installation of the boards was arranged by 'Life for a Life', a local charity, which plants trees to 'commemorate loved ones or celebrate special occasions' and to raise funds for hospitals, hospices and other healthcare-related organisations (<https://www.lifeforlife.org.uk/>).



Dr Tony Putland and Jayne Woollam (Secretary to the Trust) with one of the newly installed informational boards (March 2020).

One of the informational boards has been erected next to the new viewing screens and the other two have been placed along the public footpath that bisects the Reserve.

Review of, and Reflection on, the Work of the Trust

The enforced halt to work on the Wetlands does give the opportunity to reflect on the incredible progress made to date. It was only in June 2016 that, after some ten years of negotiation between Grimsargh Parish Council, Preston City Council and United Utilities (the original owners of the site), that the long-term future of the Wetlands was secured. Ownership of the site was passed to Grimsargh Parish Council and, at the same time, permission was given for a limited development of 12 houses adjacent to Preston Road. In this context, it is worth reflecting that this outcome was never assured, it was quite possible that, without the unwavering determination of the Parish Council and the tireless campaigning by David Hindle (Trust Chair), the whole site could have been lost to housing developments.

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In March 2017 the Parish Council approved the formation of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust and the appointment of trustees, charged with managing and developing the site on behalf of the Parish Council. The remit of the Trust was two-fold: to secure and enhance the biodiversity of the site and to improve the opportunities for all members of the local community to engage with, and enjoy, the flora and fauna of the site.

The Trust was given charitable status in July 2017 and planning for a long-term programme of work to improve both the biodiversity of the site and accessibility for the local community was undertaken by the trustees. A key aspect of this plan was that, in contrast to many other similar sites around the country, there are no paid employees of the Trust. All work undertaken would need to be done either by volunteers from the local community or by contractors employed using funds secured by the fund-raising activities of the Trust or by successful grant applications, submitted by the Trust, to external agencies and funding bodies.



The call for volunteers (Grimsargh Village Hall, September, 2017).

The Trust put out its first call for volunteers to start work on the site in September 2017. A meeting for anyone interested in volunteering was held in Grimsargh Village Hall on Thursday 21st September, 2017 and 20 people attended. This was followed up by the first of the, now regular, volunteer days on Sunday 8th October 2017. It is testament to the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers, that since that first volunteer day, there has never been a

scheduled session that has failed to attract volunteer workers. Amazingly, notwithstanding some atrocious weather conditions, only a handful of volunteer work parties have had to be abandoned when it was judged just too unsafe to work.

May 24th 2018 was a significant day for the Trust when a 25 year lease of the site was signed, by the trustees, for a 'peppercorn' rent from Grimsargh Parish Council. The summer of 2018 was, indeed, a busy time for the Trust, with the appointment of Lord Horam of Grimsargh as Patron to the Trust in June and the inaugural AGM of the Trust, held in Grimsargh Village Hall on 4th July, attended by 26 members. However, perhaps the most significant event of that summer was the award of a grant for £50,000 from the Lancashire Environmental Fund. The award was split into two components. Firstly, there was funding to improve the footpath and accessibility of the site and this work was successfully completed in November 2018. The second component of funding was for the construction of viewing screens and the creation of a new access point onto the Wetlands. Work which was, as already described in this newsletter, completed in March 2020.



The old steps, along the public footpath, onto the Wetlands - now replaced by upgraded steps and an access ramp (July 2018).



The 'pathway' leading, off the Wetlands, to the stile and fields beyond – now replaced by steps (March, 2018).

Along this time-line, there have been other notable events. Trustees appointed Ken Maylor as Warden in June, 2019 and, more recently, Neil Hartley as Assistant Warden in March 2020. Again, it is worth mentioning that these are unpaid, voluntary positions. The work of Trust Chair, David Hindle was nationally recognised in 2019, when he was a recipient of a Marsh Award (from the Marsh Christian Trust in partnership with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) for Wetland Conservation.

In addition to the regular volunteer days the Trust has initiated (from January, 2020) a programme of guided walks, open to all members of the community. Furthermore, specific educational events have been held regularly for local schools and community organisations (e.g. cubs and scouts, brownies and guides). The efforts of our volunteers have been given greatly valued 'hands-on' support by other local conservation and environmental organisations (e.g. the Ribble Rivers Trust, the Fylde Council Coast and Conservation Team) and other organisations (e.g. Environmental Agency) have chosen to hold their office 'away-days/community support days' volunteering on site. These events have been particularly valuable to us – bringing new expertises and much needed specialist equipment on site.

Volunteer work is, of course, supported by our fund-raising activities. Since the creation of the Trust, fund-raising has been an absolutely key activity and, led by trustee Andy Small, an amazing array of, often novel, approaches have been taken. Throughout the year, the Trust maintains a regular stall at a number of local community events including the Grimsargh Farmers Markets, Grimsargh Field Day, Longridge Show and a number of local Christmas Fairs. In addition to raising funds, these events also serve to maintain the profile of the Wetlands in the local community and provide excellent recruiting opportunities for new volunteers and supporters. These regular fund-raising activities are supplemented by other events, often held in collaboration with our sponsors. In this context, Grimsargh Club and The Plough, Grimsargh deserve a special mention for hosting events such as our Christmas and Spring Flower walks and a series of entertaining and informative talks, for the local community, presented by Trust Chair, and renowned local historian, David Hindle. Most recently, we launched our inaugural Wetlands calendar at the Plough (October, 2019). The calendar proved to be a complete sell-out and was, without doubt, our single most important fund-raising activity of the year. Taken together, these events raised in excess of £2660 for the Trust in the 2019-20 tax year.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that Grimsargh Wetlands has regularly caught the attention of the local news media. Both Radio Lancashire (June, 2018) and BBC North West Tonight (February, 2019) have visited the site and broadcast substantial items on the work done on site.

This brief review of the Trust's activities illustrates the fact that, irrespective of the challenges we now face, we can be confident about the continued management and development of the Wetlands. Inevitably, as a Trust, we will face funding challenges; however, the diversity of our current fund-raising activities and our willingness to explore

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new funding opportunities, makes us well placed to meet these challenges.



David Hindle (Trust Chair) with Annabel Tiffin (BBC, North West Tonight) after a day filming on the Wetlands (February, 2019).

It is likely that, for the foreseeable future, the practicalities of volunteer work on site will present a major challenge. Nonetheless, our experience to date ensures that we can be confident in mapping out the best blend of volunteer and contractor-driven work in order to achieve our vision for the continued support and development of the site.

A Wetlands Success Story

At this time of year we are all delighted to see butterflies making the most of the summer weather. Although many of us have been confined to watching out for butterflies, and other wildlife, in our gardens, it is worth remembering the incredible array of butterflies that was on show on the Wetlands last summer. This was highlighted by our BioBlitz event (August, 2019) when the, then, current invasion of Painted Lady butterflies was at its peak. That abundance of Painted Lady butterflies was an unusual, and unlikely to be repeated soon, event that perhaps gives a misleading impression about the health of butterfly populations, both locally and nationally. The reality is that populations of many butterfly species are in steep decline. This reflects relentless changes in land usage and loss of habitat along with the

accelerating pace of climate change. Against this background, it is pleasing to report that one species of butterfly, the Ringlet, is apparently thriving on the Wetlands.



Ringlet butterfly on the Wetlands (photograph by Richard Moss, July 2019).

The Ringlet is generally a butterfly of wooded areas and cool and damp places; as such, the Wetlands is an ideal habitat for them. They prefer brambles as sources of nectar so, unless you have ‘set aside’ part of your garden as a wildlife sanctuary, they are an unlikely garden visitor.

The newly emerged Ringlet has a velvety chocolate brown appearance with a striking white edging to the wings. The small circles on the underwings, which gives the butterfly its name can be quite variable in size and number (and in some cases may be missing) and the Ringlet can, occasionally, be confused with other large brown butterflies such as the male Meadow Brown, to which it is closely related.

The flight period for Ringlets in Lancashire is mid June through to the end of August, so as you read this, now is the time to look out for them. They will happily fly in cooler, cloudy conditions when other butterflies are less enthusiastic flyers (their dark brown colour

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enabling them to warm up even on the cooler days of summer).

The Ringlet butterfly was unheard of in Lancashire as recently as the early 2000s; however, over the past 20 years things have changed dramatically. In 2001 the first occurrences of Ringlets in Lancashire were recorded at Warton Crag in North Lancashire and ‘just up the road’ in Barrow, near Clitheroe. Occasional sighting of single Ringlet butterflies, in Lancashire, continued for some years and it was only in 2007 that double figure numbers of Ringlets were reliably recorded at a number of locations across Lancashire (locally, in Chorley and Blackburn). These sightings are believed to reflect the gradual spread of the species from Yorkshire into East Lancashire and beyond. In subsequent years, the colonisation of sites, across Lancashire, including the Wetlands, has continued with only the intensively farmed areas of the Fylde coastal plane failing to benefit from this expansion. The reasons for this eastward expansion of Ringlet distribution are unclear although it has, perhaps inevitably, been suggested that increasing summer temperatures may have some role. Equally, taking advantage of ecological niches vacated by other declining populations of butterfly species may be an important element of Ringlet success in Lancashire.



Ringlet feeding on Common Knapweed (July, 2019).

The first recorded sightings of Ringlet butterflies on the Wetlands were as recent as the summers of 2014 and 2015, when trustees Andy Small and David Hindle independently

identified single butterflies along the southern embankments of the site. This corresponded to the time when the first Ringlets were also recorded locally at the Brockholes nature reserve. Confirmation that there was a colony of Ringlets on the Wetlands first came in 2017 and there have been numerous sightings since then with regular records from our guided walks and other summer events. Most recently, in summer 2019, counts of up to 40 (trustee David Hindle) and 250 (trustee Andy Small) Ringlets have been recorded on the Wetlands.



Ringlet with only one pair of faint rings/spots (June, 2019).

This Ringlet population expansion is remarkable and establishes the Wetlands as one of the most important Ringlet sites in Lancashire. A review of Butterfly Conservation records (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>) indicates that only at Romiley Golf Course, Romiley, Stockport (195 in summer 2017) and Heald Brow, Silverdale (336 in summer 2018) have large colonies also been recorded locally.

Ringlet colonisation of the Wetlands is a real success story against a background of declining populations of other butterflies and provides just one example of the importance of local habitat diversity that the Wetlands provides.

Fund-raising activities

Although our traditional fund-raising activities have, of necessity, been put ‘on hold’ this does not mean that nothing is happening. Those of

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you who regularly check the Wetlands Facebook page will undoubtedly have read about the 'Crowd-Funding' initiative launched, on 23rd April 2020. The aim being to raise money to buy a number of 'tree popper' tools for the Trust. These tools are invaluable for the removal 'roots and all' of invasive willow and other scrub from the Wetlands. The initiative has been amazingly successful and, thanks to the generosity of so many people, the target of £1000, for the purchase of at least three of the tree-poppers, was reached by 15th May 2020.

Regarding our other, more traditional, fund-raising activities, we will update you by email if, and when, there are any changes to the current situation.

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.

Membership information

Current membership fees are as follows:

Individual - £20

Life - £100

Corporate - £50

Volunteers - £10 – (if a member attends 3 volunteer days per year).

If you need to update your contact details or have any other queries about membership (e.g. requests to upgrade to Life membership) then you should contact Jayne Woollam (email: jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk).

Please note. Any general queries about the work of the Trust should be sent to grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com .

Acknowledgements

All photographs used in this newsletter are from our archives (pre-April 2020). We are grateful to our sponsors and the Lancashire

Environmental Fund for their generous financial support. A full list of our current sponsors can be found on the 2020 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N^o 1173037.

LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND