
Grimpsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Winter 2020



Welcome

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter. At the time of writing, we are just out of 'lock-down'; however, under the current 'tier 3', restrictions our lives continue to be significantly disrupted. Nonetheless, we are all encouraged to undertake as much exercise/recreational activity as we wish. In this context, a visit to the Wetlands fits the bill perfectly. As always, we would encourage visitors to observe all national and local regulations and recommendations regarding social distancing and meeting with members of other households. Vigilance regarding contact with surfaces such as gates and handrails, and rigorous hand hygiene, remains as important as ever.

The work of the Trust, like many other charities, continues to be severely curtailed. Nonetheless, there have been some very significant and exciting developments on the Wetlands and you can read about them here. In addition, although some of our traditional fund-raising activities have not been possible, there is exciting news about our 2021 calendar and our new range of Wetlands Christmas cards.

We hope you enjoy reading your newsletter and we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and healthy Christmas. Finally, we all, of course, hope for a return to a more 'normal' life in the New Year and we particularly look forward to re-establishing our volunteer and community activities at the earliest opportunity.

With best wishes,

The Trustees.

News

Storage Facility

Those of you who have made use of the viewing screens recently, cannot fail to have noticed our new 'storage facility' in the Compound. This 're-purposed' shipping container will undoubtedly make life easier for volunteers and trustees working on site and finally gives the Trust a base-point on the Wetlands. The specification, purchase, installation and fitting-out of the container was organised (with military precision!) by Trustee Geoff Carefoot. Once Geoff had established the best price for the required container, Trustee Andy Small immediately set himself the task of raising the necessary funds. This was achieved, in record time, through Andy's, now familiar, 'pop-up' sales stall outside Grimpsargh Club or The Plough, Grimpsargh together with increasing levels of online 'bric-a-brac' sales.



Contractor John Dewhust preparing the site for the installation of the storage container.

The container has been screened to make it as unobtrusive as possible. Trustee Steve Whittam sourced quick-growing laurel bushes for screening purposes and it will not be long

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before these become established. Fitting-out of the container with appropriate shelving was done using re-purposed industrial shelving (Ribble Valley Shelving Ltd., Shay Lane, Longridge) and donated shelving (courtesy of Trustee Phil Atkinson).



Installation of the storage container.

Our sincere thanks go to all involved in making the provision of this facility possible, not least our many supporters and donors without who's generosity this would not have been possible.

Installation of a Sluice

You will recall, from our Autumn Newsletter, that we have recently been fortunate enough to receive a grant of £3,000 from the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity. The funding was provided in support of work to improve habitat quality and diversity on the site. One of the key aspects of this work was the installation of a small sluice on the existing spillway of the central reservoir ('The Island Lake'). This will allow better control of water levels across the Wetlands. The need for a sluice was identified as a key priority right from the inception of the Trust, but it was only once funding had been secured that work could be commenced.

The installation of the sluice was overseen by Trustee Geoff Carefoot. Further to a competitive bidding process, the contract to undertake the necessary installation work was awarded to JVT Construction (www.jvtconstruction.co.uk).



Glynn Haworth (JVT Construction) and Trustee Geoff Carefoot discuss plans for the installation of the sluice.

JVT Construction have over thirty years of experience in a diverse range of projects including flood alleviation and river work, green energy projects and regeneration schemes with a wide range of clients including Councils, Government Bodies and Water Companies. They were, for example, significant partners in the award winning United Utilities SCaMP project (Sustainable Catchment Management programme) work. (<https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-projects/details/218780-scamp-sustainable-catchment-management-programme>).



Construction of the sluice – in progress.

In this context, the installation of a small 'drop board' sluice on the Wetlands was a relatively straightforward project and the work was completed in little over a week during the latter part of September.



The completed drop-board sluice.

Re-profiling of the Islands in 'The Island Lake' – The Plan

The installation of the sluice was only the first step in our efforts to improve the habitat quality and diversity of the site. The second element of the project was to 're-profile' the islands of 'The Island Lake'. Why was this necessary?

Some long-term residents may remember the history of the site and, in particular, the work done once the original 'Grimsargh Reservoirs' had been formally decommissioned. Around 2009, extensive engineering work was undertaken whereby breaches were introduced into the embankments between the three reservoirs. These breaches, and the new spillway from the central reservoir (that eventually drains into the Tun Brook and then the Ribble) ensured that the reservoirs would never again hold significant volumes of water. The breaches are clearly seen today and the public footpath that bisects the site includes the causeway that crosses the breach between 'The Island Lake' and 'The Fen'.

When this work was undertaken in 2009, the spoil from the breaches was simply dumped into the central reservoir forming the islands that we have all become familiar with. The outcome of this can be seen in historical Google Earth images of the site. The resulting islands were essentially oval in shape with relatively limited and steep shore-lines.



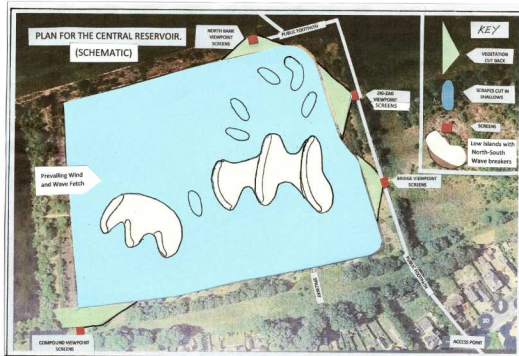
Historical Google Earth image (from 2009) of the central reservoir ('The Island Lake' as it is known today). The, then, newly formed breaches in the embankments and the spillway are clearly visible.

It has become clear over the years that although the islands, created in this way, do prove attractive to many birds (in particular, large numbers of geese), they are actually far from satisfactory in a number of ways. The limited shore-line provides only very limited opportunities for those birds (e.g. waders) that feed by 'prospecting' muddy shorelines. The steep-sided islands provide very few opportunities for young birds to safely reach the water and is a significant factor in the poor survival rate of chicks that so easily succumb to gulls targeting the islands. The fact that the islands are so high above the usual water levels also means that they never flood and, consequently, scrub and invasive willow flourish. All these factors make the islands, and therefore the site as a whole, relatively inhospitable to many species of wading birds.

Our funding success means that it is now possible to do something about the islands with the focus being on making them much more attractive to a wide variety of avian visitors and, at the same time, less attractive to the large numbers of geese that currently frequent the site. You will recall that an ongoing issue with the geese is that they are so clumsy and, as a consequence, they regularly trample the nests of other birds on the islands.

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Trustee Geoff Carefoot led the re-profiling project and, in consultation with Gavin Thomas (RSPB Ecologist – Northern England), came up with a plan (see below) to make the islands much more attractive to a variety of waders and other birds.



Outline plan for island re-profiling work (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Essentially, the plan involved making the perimeters of the islands much more complex with long 'fingers' extending from the central mass of each island thereby creating much longer shorelines for feeding waders to explore. The introduction of these 'fingers' involves redistributing material from the existing islands over a much larger surface area - thereby reducing the height of the islands. The importance of this is two-fold. Firstly the reduced height of the central mass of the islands, along with the gently sloping 'fingers', means that it will be much easier for young birds to enter the water; hopefully, increasing their survival chances. Secondly, the reduced height of the islands means that, at times when the sluice is closed, it will be possible to gently flood the islands. The reason for wanting to do this is to discourage regrowth of scrub and willow. Any that does emerge will die-off and, ultimately, increase the nutrient value of the mud in the vicinity of the islands.

The outline plan for the re-profiling project shows a number of other important features.

The island 'fingers' will be protected from the prevailing wind/wave action by rubble/masonry 'wave breakers' (excavated from the existing islands or retrieved from the exposed bed of the pool). Secondly, the plan also shows that 'scrapes' will be formed, particularly in the north-east corner of the pool. Scrapes are shallow depressions with gently sloping edges. These will help to retain water during prolonged dry periods. As such, they can support a wide variety of invertebrate life and should provide important feeding areas for wading birds around the islands.

Finally, the plan shows the possible sites for new viewing screens, along the causeway and at the far end of the public footpath through the Wetlands. The construction of these screens will be dependent on further funding success.

Re-profiling of the Islands – The Work

Once the sluice work was completed, the sluice was opened and a controlled release of water from the site was initiated. This was necessary in order for the contractor (John Dewhust) to access the islands, in safety, using his mechanical digger. This work was started in October and you will, no doubt, remember that we have just had one of the wettest Octobers on record. Inevitably, the prolonged rainfall hampered the reduction in water levels and it was only in the last weeks of November that John was able to start work on the islands.



One of the re-profiled islands with 'fingers' clearly visible.

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At the time of writing, that work is nearing completion and it is anticipated that re-filling of 'The Island Lake' will start in the first week of December.



Project leader Geoff Carefoot (left), contractor John Dewhurst (centre) and consultant Gavin Thomas [RSPB Ecologist] (right) during a break from the island re-profiling work.

It is difficult, at this point, to predict what the 'new' islands will look like after a few months of increased water levels combined with the effects of wind and wave action. It may be necessary to carry out 'refinements' to the island profiles in further years; however, there is no doubt that we have already created a habitat that is much more attractive to many species and we can expect to see some new and interesting avian visitors on the site in the not too distant future.

We are all extremely grateful to project leader Geoff Carefoot for all his hard work, determination and endless enthusiasm in bringing this project to a successful completion. Given the seemingly endless days of rain we endured in October, and some appallingly muddy conditions, Geoff has achieved, what at times, looked to be impossible. In doing this, Geoff has been greatly aided by the professional, 'can do' attitude of contractor, John Dewhurst and the advice and support of RSPB ecologist, Gavin Thomas. Our sincere thanks go to all of them.

Expected Avian Visitors

The obvious question is - just what can we expect to see visiting 'The Island Lake' in the future?

Although water levels will generally be maintained at a high 'winter-level' over the next few months, once Spring arrives, the sluice will be opened and a 'summer-level' set. This level will not, generally, be as low as that seen recently, which was necessary to allow safe access to the islands. Nonetheless, extensive areas of mud and sand will be exposed and we can anticipate visits from passage migrants such as black-tailed godwit and whimbrel, as they pass through to their northern breeding grounds. Likewise, curlew moving in from the coast, en route to their moorland nesting sites will also be seen. While the aforementioned are already regular visitors to the Wetlands, scarcities such as bar-tailed godwit and avocet, which have rarely visited (and never stayed around more than a few days) in the past, should be seen in greater numbers.

Extended feeding opportunities should improve the numbers of prospecting lapwing and oystercatcher and, hopefully, little ringed plover and common sandpiper. The re-profiled islands should also prove much more conducive to the breeding success of these species.

Late summer will attract post-breeding flocks of lapwing and curlew, containing many juvenile birds.

Autumn may well see the arrival of south-bound passage migrants such as green sandpiper and wood sandpiper. Ruff and dunlin and, following gales, more coastal species such as knot and grey plover can also be expected to put in appearances. Finally, extreme rarities such as phalaropes and scarce sandpipers cannot be discounted. Interestingly, while the

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current project has been in progress, and water levels have been low, a group of green sandpiper have regularly been seen on 'The Island Lake'.

It's not just waders that will benefit from the increased availability of exposed mud banks. Exposed mud is a favourite feeding resource of teal, a nesting material source for local house martins which flock to gather mud, and enables wagtails and pipits to range more freely, hunting hatching insects. Indeed, large groups of wagtails have routinely been making use of any breaks in work on the islands to feed on the freshly exposed mud and silt.

Essential Maintenance Work

Although the recent work of contractors on site has been the main focus of this newsletter it would be remiss not to also mention the essential maintenance work that continues to be carried out. In this context, a special mention goes to Warden Ken Maylor, and Trustees Andy Small, Phil Atkinson and Steve Whittam who have ensured the upkeep and maintenance of the site throughout these difficult times. Their efforts do not go unnoticed by visitors to the site and are much appreciated by all.

Volunteer of the year

You will recall that, in our Autumn Newsletter, we highlighted the work of volunteer Sue Atkinson using her needle-work skills to make face masks, firstly for local NHS staff and, more recently, for members of the general public. The masks are regularly available for purchase, by donation, at Andy Small's 'pop-up' stall outside Grimsargh Club or the Plough, Grimsargh and, when possible, at the open-air Grimsargh Farmers' Market.

Sue's face masks have proved to be a real hit with the public and, at the time of writing, over 250 masks have been sold and demand remains, apparently, insatiable. Most recently, Sue has been making 'limited edition' Christmas masks, made with limited supplies of Christmas-themed fabrics which have proved to be particularly popular and are selling as fast as Sue can make them.



Limited- edition Christmas-themed face masks
(photograph by Sue Atkinson).

This represents an amazing effort of Sue's part. In a year when it has proved difficult, if not impossible, to undertake more 'traditional' volunteer activities and fund-raising work for the Trust it represents a major achievement and has made a very significant impact on the funding of the Trust. In recognition of this, the Trustees have unanimously agreed that Sue be the recipient of our annual 'Volunteer of the Year' award. In making this award, the Trustees recognized, not just Sue's recent endeavours with the face masks, but were also keen to highlight Sue's efforts in regularly preparing

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refreshments for our work parties and volunteer days. Sue's cakes and other 'confectionery treats' were, for many, the highlight of the morning on our volunteer days and they are certainly something we are all looking forward to when we can recommence our volunteer work.

In recognising Sue's contribution, we should also mention husband Phil's support both in packaging the masks ready for sale and in regularly assisting Andy with the set-up and pack-away of the stall.

Wetlands Christmas Merchandise

We are delighted to announce that we have a 2021 Wetlands calendar available for purchase. Given the present circumstances, we have been unable to hold a 'launch event' for the calendar; however, despite this, Trustee Andy Small reports high demand and calendar stocks are rapidly diminishing. So the message is, if you want a calendar don't delay!



The Wetlands 2021 calendar.

The calendar makes full use of the photographic skills of our regular Wetlands photographers – Richard Moss and Gerry Small. You will recall we highlighted the work of Richard and Gerry in our last newsletter and the calendar provides

a good opportunity for you to be reminded of their skills and the wonderful Wetlands wildlife throughout the coming year.

The calendars cost £6 each and you can pick up your copy from Andy's regular sales stall. Additionally, calendars are on sale at the Grimsargh Premier Village Store and the Yorkshire Building Society in Longridge.

When you buy a calendar the entire proceeds from the sale go directly towards funding work on the Wetlands. This is possible because of the generosity of so many local businesses and organisations who have sponsored the calendar. Their sponsorship means that the cost of production of the calendar is already covered and 100% of each sale provides much needed financial support for our work.



The limited edition Wetlands Christmas Cards

In addition to our calendar, we also have a range of Wetlands Christmas cards available for purchase. The cards feature suitably wintry Wetlands scenes and are available to purchase individually (£1 per card) or in packs of 10 (£7.50 per pack). The cards come complete with envelopes and can be purchased, like the calendars, from Andy's regular stall. The cards are a strictly limited edition and, like the calendars, 100% of each sale directly supports the work of the Trust.

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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.

On a Final Note

A number of people have been thanked for their work on the Wetlands in this newsletter. Of course, there is so much more to running the Trust than this. After such a difficult year, it is only appropriate that we recognise all the work that goes on in the background and, in particular, the hard work done by the officers of the Trust. Chair David Hindle, Secretary Jayne Woollam and Treasurer Lesley Walker have all done sterling work this year. At the start of the year, none of them could have imagined the battles they would do with Zoom, Dropbox, SharePoint and Paypal and we thank them for all their efforts in keeping us going!

Acknowledgements

We thank Geoff Carefoot and Sue Atkinson for allowing the use of their photographs. We are grateful to the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity and the 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 N^o 1173037.

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