



GRIMSARCH WETLANDS

NEWS

SUMMER2021



TERN RAFTS

New Access Point and Viewing Screens
Spring Records
News



SUMMER**2021**

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Welcome

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter. Notwithstanding the continuing problems associated with the pandemic, we have recently completed two major projects on the Wetlands. Work on the new access point and viewing screens has been completed and our tern rafts have been successfully positioned on the Mere. You can read all about these projects here, along with the highlights of our Spring wildlife sightings.

At the time of writing, we are all looking forward to a significant easing of restrictions in relation to the pandemic. On the assumption that all goes according to plan, we envisage holding an Open Day on the Wetlands on 21st August, in recognition of the completion of recent work to open up access and increase viewing opportunities. We certainly hope to be in a position to invite you all to that event. Following this, we envisage being able to fully re-start our regular volunteer day activities and guided walks.

Until then, please do make use of the new access and viewing areas – summer is a wonderful time to see the Wetlands at its colourful best!

With best wishes,

The Trustees.



NEW ACCESS POINT AND VIEWING SCREENS

As outlined in the Spring Newsletter, the Trust was recently fortunate enough to receive a grant of over £10,000, from the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF – www.lancsenfund.org.uk). This was in support of work to improve access and viewing opportunities, particularly in the Fen area of the Wetlands. That work has now been completed and the new facilities are already open to the public. In summary, we have introduced a new access point and viewing area looking over the most easterly area of the Fen, along with two new viewing screens overlooking the Island Lake.

The new viewing screen overlooking the Island Lake from the northern embankment.



▲ The new access point leading to viewing screens overlooking the Fen.



▲ A Wetlands Sedge Warbler (photograph by Richard Moss).

▼ The view from the new viewing screens overlooking the Fen.



The new access point is between properties 323 and 325 Preston Road, just opposite the new pedestrian ‘refuge’ on Preston Road (opposite the Story Homes development). Access is suitable for all visitors, including those with prams, buggies and mobility scooters. It should be noted that the access point only provides access to the new Fen viewing area and there is no public access to the Fen itself, or any other areas of the Wetlands.

The Fen viewing area overlooks a small clearing in the damp willow scrub of the Fen. Within the clearing there is a bird feeding station (funded by your donations and trustee Andy Small’s tireless fund-raising efforts) and a small amphibian and dragonfly pond.

The key aspect of this work is that it has opened up a hitherto unseen area of the site to public access and offers the opportunity for visitors to see a different selection of wildlife from that most commonly seen in other areas of the reserve. The Fen habitat is especially important for Reed Bunting and, in spring and summer, several species of warblers including Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Sedge and Willow Warblers.

The damp, scrubby area of the Fen, surrounding the clearing, is also the perfect habitat for some rather shy birds that may well reveal themselves to the patient and stealthy observer. Indeed, during construction of the viewing screen, a Woodcock was one of the first birds recorded in the new clearing. In addition, we anticipate that the newly dug pond will rapidly become home to a range of species including frogs and newts and numerous aquatic insects with dragonflies and damselflies rapidly becoming an important feature of this new viewing area.

As mentioned before, while contractors were on site, we asked them to install two additional small viewing screens overlooking the Island Lake. One, at the end of the Causeway portion of the public footpath and another at the northern end of the public footpath (just by the steps down to the stile leading to the fields beyond the reserve). Following construction of the new viewing screens, trustees and volunteers have cut back embankment vegetation in the immediate areas in order to enhance the views for visitors.

These additional screens mean that, whatever time of day you visit, you will be able to observe the lake from one of our screens – without the sun in your eyes! Indeed, photographers have already been able to take advantage of ‘close-up’ views of the Island lake birdlife that the new viewing screens permit.

Finally, while this work was being undertaken, we took the opportunity to create a number of additional wildlife ponds in the Fen area. Currently, this area floods in winter and can dry out in the summer months and the new ponds will, hopefully, help to provide more stable water levels in the Fen.

One of these new ponds can easily be seen from the Causeway portion of the public footpath that crosses the site. Again, we anticipate that this will become a haven for dragonflies and damselflies, along with a range of other aquatic insects and amphibians. The areas around each of the newly created wildlife ponds have been seeded with appropriate mixtures of native wildflowers (again, funded by your generous donations and gifts).

We are extremely grateful to the Lancashire Environmental Fund for their generous financial support of this work. Particular thanks go to our contractors, John Dewhurst (Longridge) and McKay and Simpson (Southport) who completed all the work on schedule, despite the, perhaps inevitable, problems with wet weather earlier in the year. We are also grateful to trustee, Geoff Carefoot who expertly managed the project, notwithstanding the difficulties of such an undertaking during a global pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, on Saturday 21st August we plan to have an Open Day on the reserve for the formal opening of all the new viewing screens and access points (along with the Compound access and viewing point). Inevitably, the format of the event will be dictated by the prevailing public health situation; however, we certainly hope to provide a series of guided walks around the site and you will be able to familiarise yourselves with the new access points and viewing areas. We certainly look forward to seeing you all there!



▲ One of the new ponds in the Fen, as seen from the Causeway section of the public footpath.

▼ View of the islands, and associated mud banks, from the new Island Lake viewing screen.



SPRING RECORDS

Given the work, to improve habitat and biodiversity, that was carried out over the winter months, it is of particular interest to review the Wetlands birdlife recorded over the Spring (all sightings recorded on the ELOC website (<https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/Rep-Birdlist.aspx>)).

Female Common Blue Damselfly (photograph by Gerry Small).





▲ Swallow (photograph by Mike Fisher)



▲ Curlew (photograph by Mike Fisher)

Over the last few months, there have been records of encouraging numbers of waders frequenting the Island Lake. Along with the regulars (Lapwing, Curlew, Whimbrel and Oystercatcher), Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank and Common Sandpiper are regularly being seen from the new viewing screens looking onto the Island Lake.

During March, impressive numbers of both Curlew (70) and Lapwing (120) were recorded. Aside from the waders, March also saw the welcome return of Sand Martins (2) to the Wetlands. A lone Scaup (a duck often seen associating with small groups of Tufted Duck) was recorded and was probably the same bird that had been recorded at other local sites (e.g. Alston Reservoirs and Dilworth Reservoir). Two pairs of Mediterranean Gulls, in full summer plumage, were also recorded.

Early April saw possibly the highest Spring count of Curlew (105 on 6th April) on the Wetlands, along with the sighting of a lone Knot – only the second ever recorded on the site. The latter part of April saw increasing numbers of Whimbrel recorded although it was early May before numbers peaked (191 Whimbrel recorded on 7th May). A lone Dunlin was also seen.

Very good numbers of returning Sand Martin (100) and Swallows (25) were recorded in April. In addition, some real oddities were recorded. Three Mandarin Ducks were seen – a first record for the site. Historically, these exotic ducks were introduced into the UK from China and subsequent escapes from captivity have seen them established in the wild.

May also saw some rare (for the Wetlands) and, often, fleeting visitors. A lone Barnacle Goose was recorded as were ‘fly-bys’ by Merlin and Hobby. Finally, perhaps the most heartening sighting in May was the count of 15 Swift (2nd May). Locally, numbers of this species have seemed to be in a terminal decline in recent years.

In summary, the increased diversity of waders seen appears to be an immediate consequence of the work undertaken during the Winter and certainly bodes well for the future.

Finally, Spring is, of course, not just about birds. It has to be said that the weather has not been particularly conducive to observing insect life. The prolonged frosty nights of April (along with the sleet and hail showers) have done no favours to those of us looking for butterflies, moths or dragonflies etc.

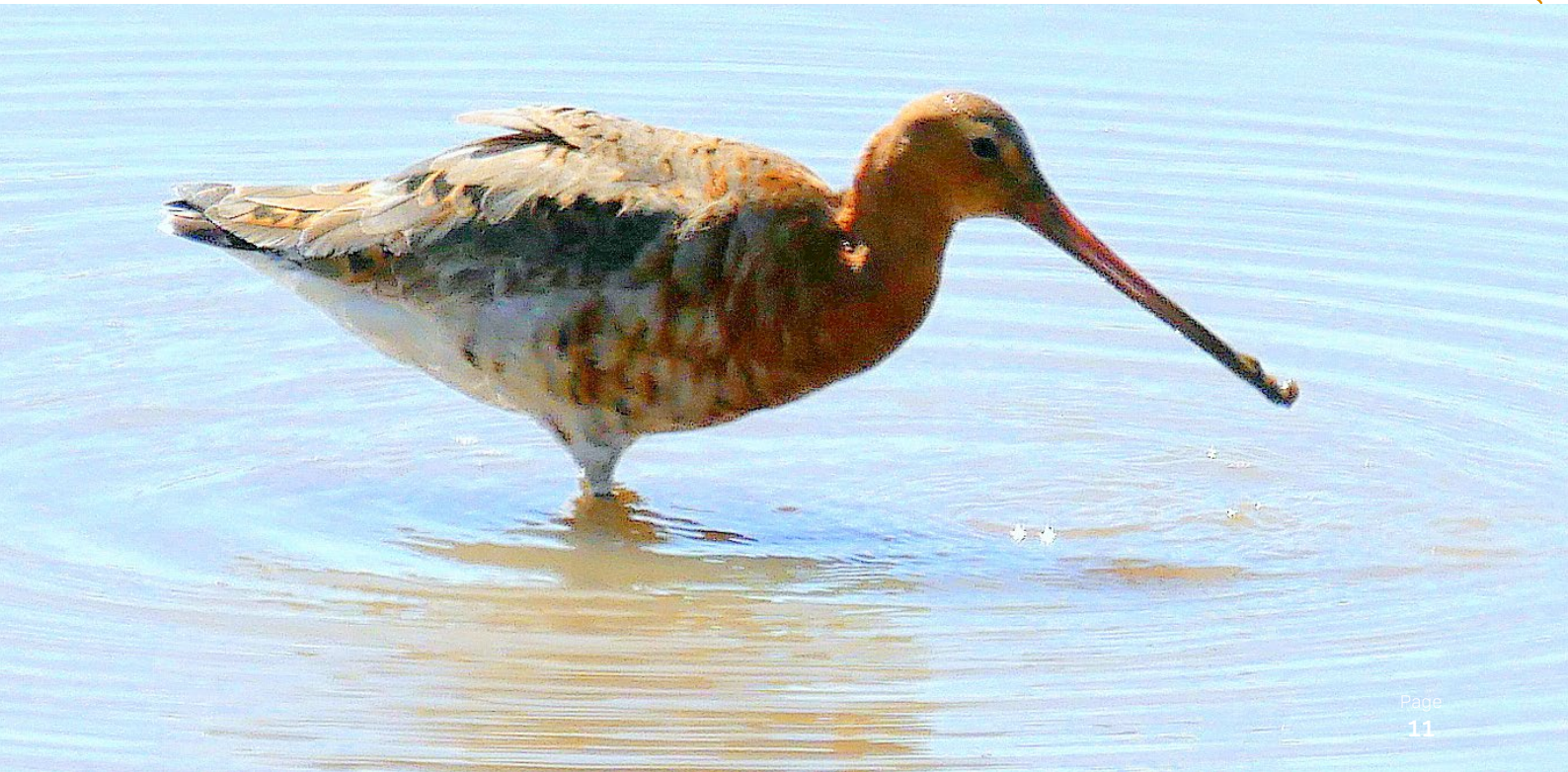
Nonetheless, there is plenty of evidence from images shared on our Facebook page that, given a bit of sunshine, insects soon appear. Orange-tip butterflies, for example, have been a very welcome and colourful sight even on cold, but bright days. Likewise, Large Red Damselflies – the first of the damselflies to emerge during the year – have been recorded on the occasional sunny days.

Fortunately, at the time of writing, the beginning of May seems to have been blessed with the (slightly) warmer, but much wetter, weather more usually associated with April. This is good news for trustee Andy Small and the wild flower meadow he is cultivating, adjacent to the Compound access point. The early rains of May came at just the right time for the germinating seedlings in the meadow!



▲ Orange Tip Butterfly (photograph by Mike Fisher)

▼ Black-tailed Godwit, in full summer plumage, as seen from one of our new Island Lake viewing screens (photograph by Geoff Carefoot)



TERN RAFTS

You will recall from our Autumn 2020 newsletter, that we had plans to use a number of empty cable drums to create tern rafts to be placed on the Mere. Cable drums make ideal rafts – a useful way of providing island habitat in areas of relatively deep water. As such, they can improve the breeding success of birds by providing areas safe from terrestrial predators. They can also provide wildfowl with 'loafing' spots or resting places.

We took delivery of our first drums in August 2020 and since then we have accumulated additional drums. We are enormously grateful to Story Homes and their subcontractor, Grain Broadband who supplied the initial batch of drums and Carefoot PLC, Longridge who provided subsequent drums. Before work could start on the placement of the drums on the Mere, there were a couple of other essential items that needed to be sourced. Firstly, a set of tern nesting trays were needed for the rafts. A big thank you therefore goes to Frank Elliott, time-served carpenter and supporter, who made up a dozen nesting trays (to be lined with pebbles) for our tern rafts and the islands. As Frank managed to get the decking timber and waterproof PVC soffit board bases for half price and hasn't charged us for construction. Each nesting tray cost only £4 – a real bargain!



▲ The tern nesting trays made by Frank Elliott (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).



▲ Geoff Carefoot with one of the completed rafts. Each raft incorporated a 'buoyancy necklace', nesting trays and anchor (breeze block!).



▲ Trustees Geoff Carefoot and Steve Whittam towing the first raft out onto the Mere.

The final 'part of the jigsaw' was the purchase of a number of plastic 'jerry can' type, screw-top containers to act as buoyancy aids for the rafts. We were lucky enough to be able to purchase all the empty used containers we needed from John Cook, on the staff of Millfield Care Home in Middleton, Bury.

In March, we were in a position to site the drums. Before doing this, a significant amount of preparatory work had to be done. The top side of each drum was fitted with nesting trays and edging to prevent gravel and pebbles (or even young chicks!) spilling off the raft, a 'necklace' of plastic jerry cans was then fitted to provide buoyancy and an anchor rope was secured to each drum.

Once the 4 rafts were ready for deployment, that was where the fun started..... Initially, trustees Steve Whittam and Geoff Carefoot attempted to row out into the Mere while towing the rafts (here, a spacial thank-you goes to Frank Casson of Barnsfold Fly Fishery for the loan of a pair of oars and rowlocks for the dinghy). Rowing proved to be a significant challenge in anything but flat-calm conditions! It did, however, allow for some fine-tuning to be carried out on the rafts to improve stability etc. before their final placement. After much valiant effort, it was decided that a re-think was needed - in the form of an outboard motor for the dinghy.

A plea, on our Facebook page, for the loan of a suitable outboard motor for our dinghy, was answered by Ian Milnes of Knowle Green. In fact, Ian offered to spend the day operating the outboard for us and effectively saved the day – so many thanks indeed! With Ian's help, ingenuity and experience it was possible to successfully site all 4 rafts in the north-western corner of the Mere.

You can observe the rafts from the viewing screens at our Compound access point – binoculars strongly recommended! A more unusual view of the rafts has been provided by Mark Ashmore. Mark is an expert drone photographer and many of you will be familiar with his aerial photography of the Wetlands.

As you will see from the front cover image of this newsletter, the newly positioned rafts and nesting trays are clearly visible. We are extremely grateful to Mark Ashmore for his ongoing drone work, documenting the changing face of the Wetlands.

Tern Rafts – so what can we expect?

Terns are migratory birds generally only seen in the UK during the summer months. Several species breed on the coasts around the UK; however, it is the Common Tern that is most likely to be seen at inland locations. These elegant birds tend to breed on shingle beaches, rocky islands and inland on the gravel shores of gravel pits, lakes, reservoirs and rivers.

Locally, Terns have, for a number of years, successfully nested on the pontoons at Preston Dock (<https://www.fyldebirdclub.org/preston-dock-terns.html>). The adult birds arrive during the last week of April and the first weeks of May, with a colony of over 100 nesting pairs routinely seen there in recent years. Sadly, predation of the nests is an all too common problem with nesting Coot and marauding Lesser Black-backed Gulls taking many chicks.

Although the Wetlands is obviously further inland than Preston Dock, it is very close to the Ribble – where Common Tern are known to feed all the way up to Ribchester and beyond. Equally, the nearby Lancaster Canal is a very productive waterway for feeding tern. So, we have every expectation that sooner, or later, Common Tern will be seen on the Wetlands and the newly deployed rafts should make ideal nesting sites for them. Fingers crossed!

Finally, it is worth mentioning that another possible tern visitor on the Wetlands is the Black Tern (as the name implies, a small tern with an all black head and body during the early summer months). Lone Black Terns have occasionally been seen feeding on the Wetlands and the nearby Alston Reservoirs and Wetland. However, this tern rarely nests in the UK, so is very unlikely to make use of our rafts.



▲ Trustee Geoff Carefoot and helmsman Ian Milnes preparing to deploy one of the rafts.

▼ Job done! All four rafts finally in position in the north-west corner of the Mere.



NEWS

Media Coverage of Wetlands Work

The award of a grant, in support of the recent work on the Wetlands, generated a significant amount of interest in the local media. A press release prepared by volunteer/corporate sponsor, Hannah McGivern (www.hancommunications.com) was used by a number of local newspapers including the Chorley Guardian, Clitheroe Advertiser, Burnley Express and Evening Lancashire Post.

On 25th March, BBC Radio Lancashire interviewed trustee, Geoff Carefoot about the work. Such was Geoff's enthusiasm for the Wetlands, that interviewer, Nishma Hindocha became concerned about the fate of 'poor Mrs Carefoot', while Geoff was out working all day long on the Wetlands!

Fund Raising

The current difficult circumstances continue to have an impact on our fund-raising activities. Notwithstanding the easing of restrictions, fund-raising opportunities remain limited with no Grimsargh Field Day or Longridge Show this year – normally key events in our fund-raising calendar. This makes it all the more remarkable that trustee Andy Small still manages to generate income in support of the Wetlands. Most recently, funding for the new bird-feeding station in the Fen has been secured. In addition to this, Andy has raised over £600 in donations and sales for the purchase of Bat detectors and Moth Traps. This vital equipment will enable the recording of some of the, sometimes overlooked, residents of the Wetlands and we are grateful to all who have supported us with donations and goods for the Wetlands stall and, of course, all those of you who have 'clicked and collected' in support of the Wetlands.

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.

**LANCASHIRE
ENVIRONMENTAL
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Volunteer Days and Guided Walks

As indicated elsewhere, we expect to re-start these activities following our Open Day on 21st August. Having said that, providing the public health situation permits, it is possible that there will be some small-scale, highly focussed, volunteer opportunities in the coming weeks (bird nesting precludes large-scale volunteer days during the summer months). Volunteers will be emailed about any such opportunities, as and when they occur. You are, of course, also able to find information about volunteering opportunities and other activities in the 'What's On' section of our website (<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/>) .

Membership information

Membership information is available 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 Trust Secretary, Jayne Woollam (jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk).

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



www.grimsarghwetlands.org

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