

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Autumn 2021



Welcome

Welcome to our Autumn newsletter. First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those of you who attended our recent Open Day. It was truly gratifying that on a dreary, wet Saturday afternoon, during what was supposed to be 'high summer', over seventy people attended for the long-delayed, formal opening of our new viewing screens and access points. You can read all about the day in this newsletter.

It would be wonderful if the support seen at the Open Day translated into new volunteers attending our up-coming programme of volunteer days. Anyone who took part in the Open Day guided walks, cannot help but be struck by the impact of the last 18 months 'lay-off'. Nature has certainly not been 'locked down' and there is much to be done to return the site to the state it was in before the pandemic. Again, you can read more about our Autumn programme of work in this newsletter. It is no exaggeration to say that the work we do in the coming months will be critical in ensuring that, for example, we do not lose the beds of orchids and primroses that the site has become so renowned for.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and look forward to seeing many of you toiling away on the embankments in the weeks ahead!

With best wishes,

The Trustees.

News

Open Day

Our Open Day took place on Saturday 21st of August. Given the dire weather forecast for the day, there was a great deal of apprehension about the predicted 'thunderly rain showers'. Fortunately, by the time the event started, we only had a little drizzle to cope with and everything went ahead as planned.



Attendees gathered for the start of our Open Day activities.

Trust Chair, David Hindle got things underway, providing attendees with a brief background to the site and the work that has been undertaken. This was followed by a few words from the Trust's Patron, Lord Horam of Grimsargh, who had travelled from London to attend the event. Representatives from the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF) then added comments about the Fund's support for the site. We were delighted that both Andy Rowett (LEF Fund Manager) and Shaun Turner (County Councillor for the Environment and Climate Change and LEF Director) were able to attend. It is only through the continued generosity of LEF that we have been able to develop the site, with new viewing screens and access points, in the way that we have. It was left to Andy to conclude the formalities and 'cut the ribbon' thereby officially opening the Compound viewing screens and access point.



Ribbon cutting! LEF Fund manager Andy Rowett cuts the ribbon while LEF Director, Shaun Turner (left) and Trust Patron, Lord Horam (centre) look on. (Photograph by Jayne Woollam).

It was heartening to see so many people attend the event and, in particular, it was good to see so many of the people who were instrumental in the creation of the site, following the decommissioning of the original United Utilities reservoirs. Preston North County Councillor, Ron Woollam was present. Some of you will, no doubt, recall the campaigning work done by Ron, who enlisted support from Ribble Valley MP, Nigel Evans, in his efforts to save the reservoirs from development back in 2005.



County Councillors Ron Woollam (second from right) and Shaun Turner (right) chatting with Andy Rowett (LEF Fund Manager – left) and Lord Horam (Patron to the Trust – second from left).

Likewise, both Lindsay Philipson and Eileen Murray, who, as members of Grimsargh Parish

Council, were closely involved in establishing the Trust to oversee the site, were present. Additionally, former Grimsargh Parish Councillors, Neil and Bobby Cartwright travelled from Liverpool to attend the event.



Lindsay Philipson (left) and Eileen Murray (centre) with Trustee, Jayne Woollam (complete with a basket of Wetlands shortbreads!).

It was also good to see so many of our most loyal supporters. The Putland family, who funded our information boards were there. The eagle-eyed among you will, perhaps, have noticed the these boards have now been updated to include all the new viewing screens and access points. In addition, those of you who enjoyed the ‘special-edition’ shortbread, complete with our lapwing logo icing, will be interested to know that Sarah generously donated these to mark the occasion.



Special-edition Grimsargh Wetlands shortbread – courtesy of Sarah Putland (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

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Members of the Putland family discussing updated Wetlands information boards (or was it Wetlands shortbread?) with Trustee, Geoff Carefoot.

The head-teachers of both our local primary schools were present. You will, perhaps, remember that children from both schools contributed the art work on our information boards and both schools (Alston Lane Catholic Primary School, Headteacher – Mr M FitzGibbon) and Grimsargh St Michaels Church of England Primary School Headteacher - Stuart Booth) have been long-time supporters of the Wetlands. We certainly hope it will not be long before we can, once again, host events for the schoolchildren.

Special mentions should also go to our volunteers who supported the event. Steve Lunt stepped in to lead a guided walk. Michelle Kaye and Barbara Bolton did so much in the morning, under less than ideal conditions, preparing refreshments for attendees. Finally, it was wonderful to see Colin Wells, one of original volunteers. We do all send Colin, and his wife Margaret, our very best wishes.

Following the formalities and guided walks, the, by then, rather wet and hungry attendees were invited for refreshments, hosted by Jayne and Ron Woollam. Overall, the event was judged, under the circumstances, to be a real success and our thanks go to all who participated.



After-walk refreshments in the rain. (Photograph by Jayne Woollam).

Other News

Tern Breeding Success

You will recall, from our last newsletter, that a great deal of effort was put into the creation and installation of several 'tern rafts'. The rafts were positioned towards the far side of the Mere just in time for the local arrival of terns (specifically, Common Terns). We were, of course, eager to see if the rafts would come to the attention of any terns although we were all realistic about the likelihood of nesting/breeding success so soon after the deployment of the rafts. So, it was wonderful to find that, early in June, the rafts had attracted a single tern (first reported on the ELOC website on 9th June) – soon to be joined by a second bird.



Pair of terns checking out the nesting trays on our rafts (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

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It soon became clear that the pair of birds were interested in nesting. Their behaviour - one bird on 'look-out duty' ready to deal with any threats (e.g. Lesser Black-backed Gulls) with the other occupying nesting tray N°8 for prolonged periods - suggested that a nesting attempt was underway.



The first signs of nesting (photograph by Gerry Small).

The first indications of breeding success came midway through July when, first one and then two, chicks were seen with their parents. At the time, we were greatly relieved that the newly hatched chicks survived an overnight downpour that could so easily have proved fatal for them. Within a week, or so, the juveniles were seen on other rafts and then on the large island of the Island Lake. By the end of July, the juveniles appeared to be independent of their parents flying and fishing by themselves.

Of course, the terns will not stay with us. If they haven't already done so, they will soon be returning to the coast. Indeed, at the time of writing (early August), large 'pre-migration' roosts of terns are being seen along both the Sefton and Fylde Coasts. Many of these North West birds are known to winter on the coasts of West and South-West Africa. Hopefully, they will return here next April.

Clearly, we are delighted that terns have successfully fledged youngsters from the rafts this year. Those of you who paid careful attention to the images of the rafts in our last newsletter will undoubtedly have noticed that

one of the rafts was equipped with a pair of wooden 'decoy' terns and it is quite possible that these decoys (patiently carved and painted by Trustee, Geoff Carefoot) were key in attracting the attention of the terns.



Parent over-seeing recently hatched chicks (photograph by Gerry Small).



Growing chicks awaiting return of a parent from a fishing trip (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

The success of the tern raft project has encouraged us to consider the deployment of additional rafts during the coming Winter. In this regard, we would be delighted to hear from anyone who is able to donate suitable cable drums. We are delighted to say that we have already had a very welcome gift of over 30 plastic jerry cans for use as buoyancy aids for the rafts. We are, once again, indebted to John Cook, Bury for this extremely generous donation.

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Finally, no one should be under any illusion regarding the technical challenge of successfully photographing the terns on the distant rafts and we are indebted to all the photographers whose technical skills and patience have helped record the success of the terns this year.

Other Summer Highlights

Of course, the terns were not the only wildlife of interest over the summer months. There has been a great deal to see, especially on the re-profiled islands of the Island Lake. There was certainly a great deal of evidence of waders (Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Little Ringed Plover) establishing nests on the islands and many visitors had good views, from the newly installed viewing screens, of quite a number of wader chicks. Sadly, as is all too often the case, there is little evidence that chicks successfully evaded predation. Nonetheless, we are encouraged that the site does now offer improved nesting opportunities for waders.

In the coming months, we will be doing more to further improve the opportunities for wader nesting and breeding success. Firstly, we will be using large quantities of 'beach pebbles' to create some high points and ridges on the islands. These will make attractive nesting sites – safe from flooding in the event that persistent rain raises the level of water in the Island Lake. Additionally, a number of clay drainage tiles will be placed on the islands. These will act as refuges for juveniles and should help with the problem of predation. Finally, many of you will have noticed that during recent prolonged dry periods, the water level of the Island Lake drops sufficiently to allow mammalian predators access to the islands (as evidenced by tracks in the mud and silt). In order to help deter this, we plan to undertake work to establish a 'moat' around the north-east corner of The Island Lake. Hopefully, these changes will improve wader breeding success in the coming years.

There are a number of other avian summer highlights to report. On The Mere, Little Grebe

(Dabchick) successfully bred and, because of the work done in the Winter to clear the area in front of the Compound viewing screens, some good views of the juvenile grebes rewarded the patient and stealthy observer.



Parent and juvenile Little Grebe (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Away from the water, local residents, whose gardens back onto the Wetlands, were once again treated to the sight (and sound!) of a family of Tawny Owls in the trees lining the southern embankment of the Fen.



Juvenile Tawny Owls hiding in the trees behind the Fen (photograph by Richard Moss).

The summer months are, of course, associated with some very active insect life on the Wetlands. Given the very cold and frosty days of Spring, it is not surprising that insect life was a bit slow to 'take off' but the sustained hot and dry weather of June and July certainly helped. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that, locally, butterflies and moths struggled with the cold Spring. Having said that, some superb counts (over 300!)) of Ringlet butterflies were recorded by Trustee, Andy Small. This, once

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again, confirms the Wetlands as one of Lancashire's premier Ringlet sites.



Ringlet butterfly (photograph by Gerry Small).

Damselflies and dragonflies also appear to have suffered locally from the cold Spring. Nonetheless, some impressive sightings have been recorded on the Wetlands. Once again, Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies have been seen. There was a time when these were a relative rarity on the Wetlands but they do appear to have been more successful in recent years.



Male Broad-bodied Chaser (photograph by Richard Moss).

Some excellent images of these dragonflies were captured by our photographers. The male Broad-bodied Chaser is particularly impressive with its highly distinctive powder blue abdomen.



Female Broad-bodied Chaser (photograph by Gerry Small).

Interestingly, the underlying colour of the male's abdomen is actually yellow (just like the female) and the blue colouration come from a powdery/waxy coating (or pruinescence). There is speculation that this colouration may help with recognition by other dragonflies and/or help in cooling their bodies by reflecting radiation.

Finally, those of you who have visited the Compound viewing screens, cannot help but have noticed the incredible display of Teasels. These are the result of the extensive seeding program that was undertaken before the lockdowns begun (this is a biennial plant flowering in its second year). The good news is that the seed heads, that often prove to be so attractive to Goldfinches and other birds, will ensure self-seeding and establishment of increasing numbers of plants in this area.

The Life History of a Wetlands Oystercatcher

Early in the afternoon of 18th June, Trustee, Geoff Carefoot observed 5 Oystercatchers flying into the Wetlands after feeding in adjacent pasture. Closer observation showed that one bird was ringed.

Geoff takes up the story. *"Apart from the standard left leg metal ring from the British Trust for Ornithology, with a unique number (FA71958), this bird also had two plastic rings*

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on its right leg, yellow over blue, with the white alpha numeric code of H2 (see photograph).



Ringed Oystercatcher (H2) (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

These colour-coded plastic rings with alpha-numeric codes have been introduced by ringers so that observers can identify individual birds at a distance without having to capture or disturb them to note their metal ring number."

On returning home, Geoff 'fired up the internet' and looked into the history of this ringed bird. Geoff continues. *"Investigation showed that this individual bird was one of 190 Oystercatchers captured after dark on the evening of 4th February 2018 by cannon-netting at the Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve on the Exe estuary in Devon by the Devon and Cornwall Ringing Group and it was identified then as a third calendar year bird – hatched in 2016.*

Of the 190 birds ringed, 150 were also fitted with numbered plastic rings to help in on-going identification. This is the first time that this particular bird has been observed away from its wintering site – a distance of 359km to the south.

The traditional and nationally important winter roost site at Dawlish has seen steadily falling numbers and the local ringing group initiated a

program of ringing to try to identify the wintering birds migration routes and breeding areas to try to identify factors in the decreased wintering numbers. Oystercatchers ringed at the same session in 2018 have since been observed in summer in Shetland, Orkney, Argyll and Speyside but others from different winter sessions have been observed breeding as far afield as Arctic Norway.

As Oystercatchers can live for more than 30 years it is hoped that this bird will be identified again in the future – possibly at Grimsargh."

A full life-history of the ringed bird can be seen here -

<http://www.dcwrg.org.uk/recoveries/oystercatcher/bird/GBT-FA71958> .

Fund Raising

Notwithstanding the lifting of restrictions, fund-raising opportunities have remained 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 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. Andy is continuing with his increasingly popular 'click and collect' service. Now that the Grimsargh Farmers' Markets have been re-instated (third Saturday of each month) he will, helped by Phil and Sue Atkinson, be running the regular Wetlands stall.

New Corporate Sponsors



BLUE MOON COMPUTERS

We are delighted to announce that Blue Moon Computers of Berry Lane, Longridge

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(<https://www.bluemooncomputers.com/>) have become our latest Corporate Sponsor.

Blue Moon Computers is a long established (over 20 years) local business, run by Steve and Helen Millington, and many of you will be familiar with them as the first 'port of call' when computer problems arise – something many of us have had to deal with in the time of 'working from home' and 'zooming'.

In addition to keeping us all online and working, Blue Moon Computers are long-standing and highly valued supporters of the Wetlands. Many of you will have collected your Wetlands calendar from their shop and will, perhaps, remember that they hosted the Wetlands display and raffle in their shop at the last 'Longridge does Christmas' evening.

We are tremendously grateful for the support and generosity of all working at Blue Moon Computers and we look forward to working with our newest 'corporate sponsors' in the future.

Volunteer Days



The first 'socially-distanced' work session on Saturday 19th June (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

We are pleased to say that, after the lockdowns and restrictions of the past 18 months, we plan to hold a full Autumn programme of volunteer days. Over the summer, we held several relatively small-scale, socially-distanced work

sessions, aimed at preparing the site for our Open Day. We are now in a position to plan for our more traditional, large-scale, weekend (alternating Saturdays and Sundays) volunteer days and we would encourage as many of you as possible to join us. There is, inevitably, much work to be done, firstly to get the site back to its 'pre-pandemic' condition and then to develop it as we had planned before our work was curtailed.

The schedule of volunteer days is as follows:

Saturday 4th September
Sunday 19th September
Saturday 2nd October
Sunday 17th October
Saturday 30th October
Saturday 13th November
Sunday 28th November
Saturday 11th December



Old Friends and New Faces. Volunteers at one of our pre-Open Day work parties (undertaken after the lifting of social-distancing rules!) (photograph by Phil Livsey).

All volunteer session will start at 10 o'clock, when we meet in the Compound. Generally, we work until about 2pm in the afternoon; however, people are free to leave as and when they wish. In light of the likely continued need for vigilance regarding the public health situation, the following arrangements will apply to all our work sessions for the foreseeable future.

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1. We ask everyone to book onto the volunteer day using the, easy to use, booking system on our website:

<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/events/volunteer-days.php>

If you register as a volunteer on the website, you will be sent email reminders about volunteer days containing detailed information about both the work planned for the day and the tools you should, ideally, bring with you.

2. You should bring your own refreshments with you. Likewise we encourage you to bring your own tools (e.g. loppers, saws, rakes etc.) and safety equipment (e.g. gardening gloves).

3. Where it is necessary to share tools, appropriate sanitisation protocols will be followed.

4. Finally, in the event that restrictions are re-imposed (e.g. social-distancing), then the work sessions will be organised to ensure compliance with prevailing advice and regulations.

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.

Acknowledgements

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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 and on our website. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1174037.

LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND