

# Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Winter 2021



## Welcome



'A Wetlands Nativity' by the children of St Michael's Primary School, Grimsargh. (Photograph courtesy of Jean Coulston, Art Coordinator).

Welcome to your Winter Newsletter. If you have visited the Wetlands in recent weeks, you cannot help but have noticed that a great deal of maintenance work has been carried out over the Autumn months. This reflects the combined efforts of local contractors, visiting volunteer groups and our own regular volunteer work sessions. Given the state of the site after the long 'pandemic lay-off', the recent work has transformed the site. You can read all about our efforts in this newsletter.

We do, of course, encourage you all to visit the Wetlands at every opportunity and, in particular, during your Christmas break. However, at the time of writing there is a significant national outbreak of Avian Influenza (bird flu) and there have been a number of cases in Lancashire. In essence, this means two things. Firstly, you should not handle any sick or dead wild birds. Secondly, if you are out and about in the countryside, you should be aware of any

'Temporary Control Zones' that have been implemented and the need to follow biosecurity advice especially if you have contact with poultry (including game birds or as pets). You can find out more about these issues in this newsletter.

Finally, many of you will know that the Trust's Chair, David Hindle has been rather unwell recently and, I'm sure we all wish him well as he recovers.

Enjoy your Christmas reading and all good wishes for the New Year!

The Trustees.

## News

### *Contractors on Site*

Back in the early part of September, when there had been no appreciable rain for some time, local contractor John Dewhurst (Longridge) returned to complete some 'fine-tuning work' on the islands of the Island Lake. We always envisaged that we would need to follow-up the island re-profiling work that was done last Winter. The difference, this time, was that in the relatively dry conditions, accessing the islands was relatively straightforward and there was no repeat of the horrendous 'mud bath' that had curtailed John's work last Winter.

Towards the end of October, volunteers from the Ribble Rivers Trust (RRT - [ribbletrust.org.uk](http://ribbletrust.org.uk)) spent two days on the Wetlands. The key aspect of this collaboration is that it ensures that our waste willow, and other scrub material, can be productively recycled in other local projects.



John Dewhurst at work on the Island Lake (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Essentially, John skimmed the surfaces of the islands and was able to extend the finger-like projections to provide even more 'shore line' for wading birds. Reducing the height of the islands means that, as the water returns to its 'winter level', the islands will be only inches high - ideal for waders. At that point, we will easily be able to identify the high points on the islands. You may have noticed that John, transported several loads of beach pebbles onto the islands, along with a number of clay tiles. The pebbles will be distributed around the 'high points' on the islands, as will the tiles, thereby providing a more attractive environment for nesting birds and refuges for chicks.

Finally, John excavated out a deeper trench between the main island and the viewing screen on the north bank of the Island Lake. The purpose of this was to try and prevent access to the island by mammalian predators, during times of low water levels, when nesting birds are at their most vulnerable.



Wilkinson Landscaping making short work of embankment scrub with their flail mower.

Another local contractor that has spent time on site is Wilkinson Landscaping, based in Hothersall. Given that two men have been on site for just three days, they have made a dramatic difference to the embankments. Using their professional equipment, they were able to accomplish more in those three days than even the most enthusiastic and hard working volunteers could hope to achieve over the course of a year. They have cleared scrub from all the embankment tops and many areas of the embankments slopes. Going forward, this means it will be much easier for volunteers to keep the tops of the embankments clear. It also means that we will, once again, be able to undertake guided walks in areas of the site not normally open to the public. Finally, of course, clearing so much scrub means that there will be much better opportunities for wild flowers to flourish on the embankments.

### *Visiting Volunteer Groups*

Many of you will no doubt recall that, before the pandemic, we regularly hosted visits by other volunteer groups and organisations. It was therefore a real pleasure to be able to welcome back two of our most loyal partner organisations.



Volunteers from the Ribble Rivers Trust cutting and bundling willow for use in their bank erosion projects.

To this end, RRT volunteers cut willow and created 'brash bundles' that they took for use in projects to prevent bankside erosion at Bashall Brook, Bashall Eaves and elsewhere.



---

## Winter 2021

---

Watercourse banks that are susceptible to erosion are lined with wooden stakes and brash bundles are wired into place between the stakes. The brash protects the banks and silt is deposited within the brash – thereby helping to build up the bank. We are tremendously grateful to the RRT for their efforts which have had a dramatic impact on our scrub clearance programme.



‘Super volunteer’ John Willan who, in addition to being one of our own regular volunteers, also undertakes weekly volunteer work with the Ribble Rivers Trust.

Early in November, we were joined by a team from the Fylde Ranger Service (<https://www.facebook.com/FyldeRangerService/>). You may recall that the Ranger Service, along with volunteers working on the Fylde Sand Dunes Project have previously helped out on the Wetlands and it was a pleasure to be able to welcome them back again. Like the RRT team, the Rangers were interested in cutting willow. In their case, they needed the willow for their ever-popular wreath-making workshops in Lytham.

If you are interested in the Fylde Sand Dunes Project and, in particular, the novel use of Christmas trees (over 11,000 Christmas trees have now been buried on the beach to help build sand dunes) then do check their Facebook page for details of how to donate trees and the annual tree planting event that is held at the beginning of February (<https://www.facebook.com/FyldeSandDunes/>).



One of the many wreaths made using Wetlands willow (photograph courtesy of the Fylde Ranger Service).

Our own regular volunteer sessions have been well attended throughout the Autumn. On two occasions, the regular volunteers have been joined by a group of Police Cadets from the Lancashire Constabulary. Notwithstanding the atrocious weather on the day of their visit, the cadets did a remarkable job raking the embankments clear of cuttings after the contractors had been at work.



Trustees Steve Whittam (left) and Geoff Carefoot (right of centre) with a group of cadets.

In addition, they initiated a project to reveal more of the original embankment stonework. With careful work it is possible to literally ‘roll up like a carpet’ the mat of growth that, over the years, has covered the stonework. There are very good reasons for revealing areas of stonework in this way. The exposed stones provide a very different habitat for a unique range of flora and fauna. In addition to



## Winter 2021

distinctive populations of wildflowers and lichens, look out for dragonflies or common lizards basking in the warmth of the summer sun.



'Rolling back the years'. A group of volunteers exposing original stonework by rolling back the mat of accumulated growth.

Our own volunteers have also done much work to expose stonework. In this case, much of their attention has been focused on the various spillways and channels that were created when the reservoirs were decommissioned. Having done so much back-breaking work removing years of growth from the stonework, it should now be a relatively easy task for volunteers to maintain the stonework.



Volunteers Ben and Rebecca Holt at work exposing the original stonework of the spillway from the Island Lake.

Finally, some of our younger volunteers spent time carefully siting a number of hedgehog boxes around the Wetlands.



A hedgehog box is positioned on one of the embankments.

You will, no doubt, be aware that, in recent years, the hedgehog population has been in perilous decline. This is particularly so for rural populations of hedgehogs and we hope that the Wetlands can provide a safe haven for these ever-popular mammals.

### *Visit by Lancashire Environmental Fund*



Trustees with Andy Rowett (third from right) and Jennifer Tidy (second from right) of the LEF.

As a follow-up to our Open Day in August, representatives from the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF) returned to the Wetlands at the beginning of November in order to take photographs of some of the work that they have so generously funded over the past few years. As one of their 'flagship' projects, the Wetlands will feature heavily in their upcoming annual report and their publicity material. The visit also provided the opportunity for trustees to personally thank Andy Rowett (LEF Fund Manager) for his staunch support of

---

## Winter 2021

---

the Wetlands for which we are all extremely grateful.

### Wildlife Highlights

#### Water Scorpion



Wetlands Water Scorpion (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

During routine maintenance and cleaning of the sluice, Trustee Geoff Carefoot came across a magnificent example of a Water Scorpion (*Nepa cinerea*) - something he had not seen since he was 'a lad'. Water Scorpions, typically around 2 inches in length, are underwater predators that ambush tadpoles and small fish with grabbing, pincer-like legs. They then injects a digestive enzyme into the prey and suck out the body fluids, leaving behind an empty shell. It is not, of course, a true scorpion and what looks like a stinging tail is actually a siphon (or breathing tube) that allows the insect to breathe air from the surface of the water. It is a poor swimmer, preferring to walk around in mud and debris along shore lines. It is known to bite, but, fortunately for Geoff, the bite is not particularly painful for humans!

#### A Visitor from Arctic Canada



Pectoral Sandpiper (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September, Grimsargh Wetlands was host to a wind-assisted transatlantic migrant from the Canadian Arctic. Trustee Geoff Carefoot takes up the story:

*"A juvenile (hatched this spring) Pectoral Sandpiper from the tundra of Nunavut Province and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago was feeding on the newly exposed mud of the Island Lake.*

*The bird was discovered and identified the previous day at the nearby Alston Wetland by the RSPB's Northern England Ecologist and local resident Gavin Thomas who manages Alston Wetland on behalf of United Utilities. Local birders were informed and delighted to see this 'first' for Alston busily feeding at the water's edge.*

*Whilst being watched on Saturday morning, and after being 'chivvied' by the loafing Lapwing flock, it suddenly departed south west with a few Snipe, quickly followed by Gavin who suspected it might well drop in to Grimsargh. His intuition was correct and again it began busily feeding alongside a Lapwing flock. Unfortunately, after an hour or so of feeding, being watched by a fortunate few, it suddenly departed to the west and was lost from sight."*

This record is a first for the Wetlands. We were not alone in being fortunate enough to see this



---

## Winter 2021

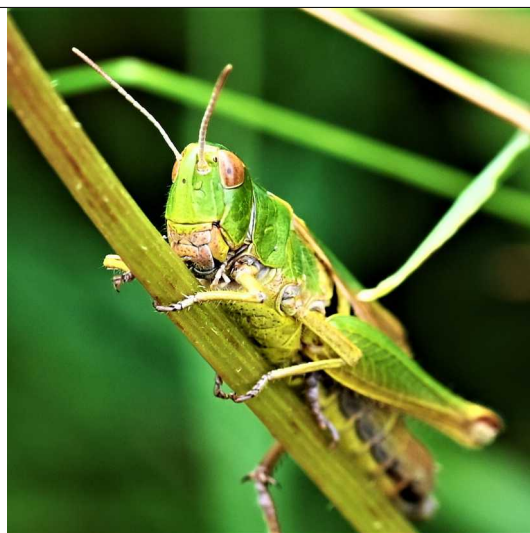
long-distance migrant. During the early weeks of September some 75 Pectoral Sandpiper were reported at more than 50 different sites across the U.K. Geoff goes on to explain why there may have been such a dramatic influx of these diminutive waders:

*“The Pectoral Sandpiper is a small, high arctic breeding, long-distance migrant which summers and breeds on the arctic tundra of Nunavut and Alaska but which migrates to the west coast of South America for the ‘winter’. An East Siberian population which I have observed breeding on the Kolyma delta, winters in southern Australia/New Zealand. As a consequence, some of these extreme long-distance migrants travel 18,000 miles round-trip between their breeding grounds and wintering grounds.*

*It gets its English name from its sharply delineated breast or chest markings, is about the same size as a Dunlin at about 20 cm and its world population has decreased by 50% over the past 50 years as have many long-distance migrants, finding their essential coastal ‘stop-over’ sites developed or destroyed. Nonetheless, it is probably the most likely Canadian wader to be encountered on this side of the Atlantic due to it being affected by low pressure weather systems whilst on its southerly migration in September. No doubt the remnants of Hurricane/Storm Ida which flooded New York recently and subsequent westerlies are responsible for a number of Pectoral Sandpipers being discovered on our side of the Atlantic this autumn.”*

### Grasshopper Survey

During August and September, Wetlands photographer Gerry Small carried out a meticulous survey of some of the Wetlands ‘mini-beasts’. Gerry’s efforts resulted in some stunning ‘macro’ images of the Wetlands grasshopper populations.



*Common Green Grasshopper (photograph by Gerry Small).*

In the U.K., there are 11 species of grasshopper and they represent what is probably the oldest living group of chewing herbivorous insects. Most commonly found in tangles of vegetation they can be a real challenge to see, let alone photograph. Fortunately their characteristic sound or ‘stridulation’ – made by rubbing hind legs against wings, can often give away their location. Distinguishing grasshoppers from crickets is generally straightforward. If you hear them in the daytime it’s probably a grasshopper, if it’s dusk it will most likely be a cricket. In addition, crickets can be distinguished from grasshoppers by their larger body size (up to 2 inches in length) and their very long antennae.

Gerry was able to identify a number of species of grasshopper (including the Common Green Grasshopper and the Meadow Grasshopper), but perhaps his most remarkable observations related to some of the colour variants that he recorded. Although most often camouflaged green/brown to hide in vegetation, some extremely brightly coloured individuals, while uncommon, are not unknown.



*Erythrismic grasshopper – ‘Mr Pink’ (photograph by Gerry Small).*

Perhaps the most striking example of this colour variation among grasshoppers are red or pink coloured individuals and Gerry was able to capture a stunning image of one of these so-called erythrismic grasshoppers. This unusual pink/red colouration is usually a consequence of a rare mutation resulting in an absence of a normal pigment and/or over-production of others. Clearly, such camouflage-busting colouration doesn't bode well for the survival of the individual concerned and this probably explains their rarity.

### *Oak Spangle Galls*

Many of you may have noticed some very distinctive growths of the leaves of oak trees. Photographer, Gerry Small captured a particularly striking image of this phenomenon as it affected one particular Wetlands oak tree.



*Oak Spangle Gall (photograph by Gerry Small).*

These nodules or discs are Spangle Galls and they are a consequence of the activities of a tiny

gall wasp, *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum*. The wasp punctures the leaf and lays an egg. This results in a defensive response by the oak creating a scab (gall) around the egg. In Autumn, the gall drops off the leaf just before leaf-fall. In Spring the egg hatches, larvae feed on the gall material and subsequently develop into a 'wingless' wasp. This immature wasp finds its way back to the tree and lays another egg resulting in the formation of another distinctive gall from which the adult (winged) wasp hatches.

### *Fund Raising Activities*

The weeks leading up to Christmas are, from a fund-raising perspective, perhaps the most important for us. Trustee Andy Small has been busy with his 'Click and Collect' sales along with his regular book stall at The Club, Grimsargh and at the monthly Grimsargh Farmers' Market events at the Village Hall. The 2022 Wetlands calendar has been available for purchase for several weeks now and sales have been brisk enough to warrant a second print-run. The calendar once again highlights the photographic skills of our regular Wetlands photographers - Richard Moss, Gerry Small and Geoff Carefoot and we are grateful to them all for allowing the use of their images in this way. We are also extremely grateful to our calendar sponsors. Their generosity means that every penny raised by the sale of calendars goes directly to fund work on the Wetlands.

In addition to the calendars, Wetlands Christmas cards are available (although we do hope you have purchased all your cards by now!) as is a supply of Wetlands mugs. All these items can be purchased at Andy's stall or online at our website shop:

<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/shop/>

In November, Andy attended the Bonfire Night celebrations at The Plough, Grimsargh and, thanks to the generosity of attendees, was able to collect over £170 in donations for the Wetlands.

---

## Winter 2021

Finally, we were delighted to receive a cheque for £300 from Tim Horton and John Baron of the Preston Guild Lodge as part of their on-going programme of support for charities in the local community.



*Tim Horton presents a cheque from the Preston Guild Lodge to Trust Chair, David Hindle (photograph by Jayne Woollam).*

All these donations, gifts and merchandise purchases are so important for the upkeep of the Wetlands. Without people's generosity, much of the maintenance work outlined in this newsletter simply would not have been possible and we are truly grateful for everyone's continued support.

### Future Volunteer Days



*It takes more than a blizzard to dampen the enthusiasm of our volunteers! (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).*

As outlined earlier in this newsletter, the Autumn schedule of volunteer days proved to be highly successful and a great deal was achieved by all who participated so

enthusiastically. Our volunteer days will, weather permitting, continue through the Winter. The schedule of volunteer days is as follows:

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January  
Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> January  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> February  
Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March  
Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

All volunteer sessions start at 10 o'clock, when we meet at 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 continue to apply to all our work sessions.

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 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.



---

## Winter 2021

### 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](mailto:jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk)).

**Please note.** Any general queries about the work of the Trust should be sent to [grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com](mailto:grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).

### Visiting the Wetlands

As mentioned at the beginning of the newsletter, the U.K. is currently experiencing a significant outbreak of Avian Influenza. You can find the latest information about the outbreak here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#latest-situation>

The Animal and Plant Health Agency has a useful Facebook page here:

<https://www.facebook.com/APHAGov/>

Their advice about what to do in the event of finding a sick or dead wild bird is summarised in their recent post shown below:



Where cases of avian influenza are confirmed, local 'Temporary Control Zones' may be declared. Details of the measures (e.g.

disinfection protocols etc.) that apply in these zones can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu-cases-and-disease-control-zones-in-england#cases-and-disease-control-zones>



In the event that any measures apply specifically to the Wetlands (and/or surrounding areas), they will be advertised on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Geoff Carefoot, Gerry Small, Jayne Woollam, Jean Coulston and the Fylde Ranger Service for allowing the use of their photographs. We are grateful to the Lancashire Environmental Fund for their generous financial support. A full list of our local sponsors can be found on the 2022 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar and on our website. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1174037.

**LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND**