

# Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

**Spring 2022**



## Welcome

Welcome to your Spring Newsletter! After over two years of coping with the pandemic we are now, hopefully, getting back to doing all the things we love and enjoy. As you know, the activities of the Trust have been severely curtailed over the past two years. Looking ahead, we have a full programme of events planned for the coming months. As a start, we will be holding our traditional Spring Guided Walk on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March and we look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible. Another important date for your diary is Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July when we plan to hold our first Annual General Meeting in nearly three years. All members are entitled to attend and participate in this key event in the running of the Trust and we encourage all members to attend. For the first time since, Summer 2019, Grimsargh Field Day and Longridge Show are scheduled to run this year and we anticipate being involved in both. You will find more details about all of these events in this Newsletter.

We are also delighted that we can, once again, organise special events for local community groups on the Wetlands and we are extremely pleased that the children of St Michael's Primary School, Grimsargh will be the first to benefit from this.

Spring is the ideal time to visit the Wetlands and we encourage you all to make the most of your local nature reserve either individually or at one of our up-coming organised events.

We hope you enjoy reading your newsletter.

The Trustees.

## Winter Highlights on the Wetlands

Perhaps the most striking thing about the last few months is just how mild it has been. Locally, with only a few frosty nights and little snow to speak of, it is not surprising to find that there have been some rather 'unseasonal' observations on the Wetlands.



An Early Purple Orchid emerging (early February) on the Wetlands.

On New Year's Eve, Trustee Andy Small and photographer, Gerry Small took time out to survey the Wetlands. They were amazed to find Early Purple Orchids already emerging. Overall, they counted 35 orchids on the embankments. As the name implies, this orchid is one of the first to flower and usually blooms in Spring (April-May), often alongside Bluebells. Andy estimated that the orchids were emerging some five weeks earlier than usual – certainly a record for the Wetlands. A Dandelion was also seen 'in bloom' on New Years Eve. During a subsequent survey, the first Primrose was seen flowering on 30<sup>th</sup> January.

We should, perhaps, not be too surprised to see the 'out of season' blooming of flowers. Many of you will have seen the recent media reports about the work of scientists at the University of

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Cambridge. This research confirms what many of us have suspected for some time: climate change has already led to plants in the U.K. flowering, on average, one month earlier than traditionally expected.



Primrose flowering on the Wetlands (early February).

Alongside the early emergence of the orchids and other flowers, Andy and Gerry were also amazed to find some very unexpected insect life with unseasonal, moths, butterflies and ladybirds seen.



Orange Ladybird (New Year's Eve) on the Wetlands (photograph by Andy and Gerry Small).

The Orange Ladybird (above) should have been hibernating amongst leaf litter or in sheltered 'nooks and crannies' in trees; instead, it was out and about on New Year's Eve. This particular ladybird is easily distinguished from other species with its bright orange colour and 14-16 creamy white spots. It has become much more widespread and abundant in recent years although you would normally only expect to see it in the warmer months (April – October). Typically it is found on, or around, Ash or

Sycamore trees where it feeds on leaves and, particularly, on the mildew that forms on leaves.

### *Wetlands Fungi*

The generally mild, and often damp, weather has also provided some ideal growing conditions for fungi and photographer Gerry Small has taken the opportunity to capture some images of just a few of the huge variety of fungi found on the Wetlands.



Scarlet Elf Cup (photograph by Gerry Small).

One of the most striking of Gerry's images was of the Scarlet Elf Cup (also known as Scarlet Elf Cap or Fairies' Baths!). This fungus grows on rotting wood in damp spots or in leaf litter and, although widespread, is actually quite uncommon. As the name suggests, the caps are cup shaped and bright scarlet in colour. The Ruby Elf Cup is an almost identical species and the two can be difficult to distinguish by eye (the colours are sufficiently similar, and variable, as to be an unreliable guide). It is only by microscopic examination or DNA analysis that identification can be confidently established rather than simply presumptive. Although historically considered to be edible (if somewhat tasteless), the Scarlet Elf Cap is now considered to be inedible or even 'suspect' and should be avoided.

Another brightly coloured fungus found on the Wetlands is Yellow Brain (also known as Golden Jelly or Witches' Butter!). Typically, it grows as an orange gelatinous mass on dead



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wood. During dry weather, the colour is lost; however, it will easily rehydrate and regain its bright colour following rain. It is actually a parasitic fungus feeding on, and eventually enveloping, a variety of wood-rotting fungi (e.g. Rosy Crust fungus). The fungus has potential medical significance, producing several compounds with anti-inflammatory and/or anti-allergic properties.



King Alfred's Cakes fungus (photograph by Gerry Small).

In complete contrast to these colourful fungi, there is the King Alfred's Cakes fungus (also known as Coal or Carbon fungus) which looks like a small lump of coal attached to the surface of rotting wood, especially fallen Ash and Beech. Interestingly, they don't rot away quickly and can remain in place for years, slowly looking even more like small burnt buns.



Jelly Ear fungus.

Finally, another gelatinous fungus – Jelly Ear (also known as Judas's Ear or Wood Ear). It

typically grows on dead Elder or Beech trees or on fallen branches in damp shady locations. The velvety, lobular, growths look (disconcertingly!) like human ears. This fungus is sometimes used in Chinese cuisine although the consensus appears to be 'nothing special' when it comes to flavour!

Of course, this is only a small selection of some of the fungi that can be seen on a walk in the Wetlands. Many other, smaller and less conspicuous, fungi can be seen by the patient observer. It goes without saying that many fungi can be highly poisonous and should not be handled.

### *Avian Highlights*

Recent months have been characterised by good numbers of waterfowl, waders and other birds on the Wetlands. We are, as always, grateful to local ornithologists for taking the time to record their 'counts' on the ELOC website (<https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/>) and the following summary is based on these data.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there has been an abundance of Mallard (over 300) on site, together with impressive numbers of Shoveler (over 40 on one occasion) and Teal (over 30) together with smaller, but nonetheless welcome, numbers of Tufted Duck (13), Gadwall (12), Shelduck (5), Pochard (2), Goldeneye (2) and Wigeon (2). A truly impressive count of Coot (40) was recorded (currently, they are most easily seen 'squabbling' on the Mere). There were smaller counts of Moorhen (8) although no recent records of Water Rail. Little Grebe (2) and Goosander (2 - briefly) have also been recorded.

An encouraging variety of waders has been recorded, especially when water levels on the Island Lake have been low enough to expose plenty of mud. Lapwing (over 300) remain the most abundant wader with smaller numbers of Curlew (43 – seen in the immediate aftermath of Storm Dudley), Oystercatcher (3), Snipe (3),

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Common Sandpiper (1), Black-Tailed Godwit (1), Redshank (1). Although not reported on the ELOC website, there have also been tantalising reports, on our Facebook page, of brief appearances by Jack Snipe and Green Sandpiper.



Snipe feeding on the Island Lake (photograph by Gerry Small).

As ever, there have been plenty of gulls around the Wetlands (over 300 Black-headed gull, along with a single Mediterranean gull). There have also been numbers of Greylag and Canada Goose although the re-profiling work on the Island Lake does appear to have dissuaded at least some of these from spending so much time on and around the Wetlands. The only report of Pink-footed Goose related to birds over-flying the site.

Regarding raptors, a hunting sparrowhawk has been a relatively common sight on the Wetlands along with Kestrel. The most impressive sight though, was that of a Peregrine dive-bombing into the Lapwing – causing a great deal of panic and commotion! There have been no recent reports of Barn Owl hunting the Wetlands. This may be related to the relatively mild weather of recent months. With the ground remaining unfrozen throughout the Winter, there has, perhaps, been no need for them to hunt in daylight hours. Heading through Spring, if they have young to feed, then they may well need to hunt more often, especially at dawn or dusk.

Of course, at this time of year, the event that we all look forward to, is the arrival of Whimbrel as they stop-off (late April - early May) on their journey to their Northern breeding grounds. Last April, over 190 birds were recorded roosting on the Wetlands. If you wish to have the best opportunity of seeing this number of Whimbrel, you really need to be up at dawn or out at dusk. The sight of groups of Whimbrel flying onto the Wetlands, after a day feeding on the estuary, and elsewhere, in the hour or so before full darkness really is a sight worth seeing (but wrap up well!).

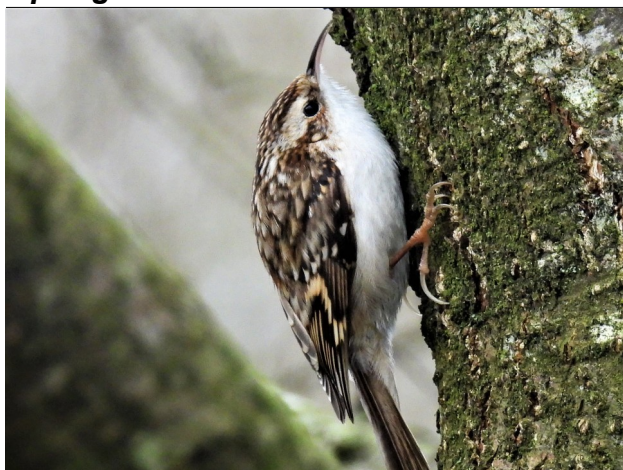
Finally, it is worth mentioning a couple of avian images from our Wetlands photographers.



Fieldfare and Redwing (photograph by Richard Moss).

The first image (above) is of a mixed flock of mainly Fieldfare and just a couple of Redwing, resting in a tree. This photograph was taken in early February when the berries, that these birds are so often associated with, have long ago been stripped from hedgerows. Instead, the birds spend their time prospecting for worms as they move around farmland in, often, very large flocks. This image is also a reminder that these 'Winter Visitors' will, by the time you read this newsletter, be beginning to leave the country and return to Scandinavia and, in the case of Fieldfare, Russia or, in the case of Redwing, Iceland and the Faroe Islands.





A Wetlands Treecreeper (photograph by Gerry Small).

The last image shows a Treecreeper – a resident woodlands bird that is most often seen moving (often quickly) up tree trunks as they look for insects and spiders in the bark of the tree. These birds are best seen in the winter months when, without foliage, there is at least a fighting chance of catching sight of these small, active birds. The trick is to focus on just looking at tree trunks rather than being distracted by what may be happening in the sky or on nearby water!

### *Avian Influenza*

As you will no doubt be aware, the U.K. has been facing an unprecedented outbreak of avian influenza ('bird flu') over the winter months. At the time of writing (February), the risk levels across England are classified as 'very high' and you can find the latest information about the outbreak here:

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

It is worth reiterating that avian influenza is primarily a disease of birds and the risk to the general public's health is very low. The most important piece of advice is that you should not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that you find. If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should

report them to the Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77).



In recent months there have been a significant number of cases of avian flu throughout Lancashire. Locally, particularly on The Fylde, there have been a number of outbreaks at commercial premises along with reports of wild birds (particularly swans, geese and raptors) succumbing. In this context, it is worth remembering that Lancashire is home to many thousands of over-wintering migratory birds with Pink-footed Goose from breeding grounds in Spitsbergen, Iceland and Greenland, Whooper Swan from Iceland and a handful of Bewick's Swan from Siberia often all sharing the same Lancashire fields and marshes. Clearly, these migratory patterns provide ideal opportunities for transmission of avian flu and other diseases.

Fortunately, to date, the Wetlands has not seen any change to expected Winter avian mortality levels; nonetheless, continued vigilance is necessary. It is often the case that, during outbreaks of avian flu, a significant 'second peak' of infection occurs during the Spring months.

As an illustration of just how bad things can become, you will perhaps be aware of media reports regarding the devastating impact of avian flu on over-wintering geese on the Solway Firth e.g.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/rspb-news-stories/avian-flu-devastating-bird-populations/> .

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Trustee, Geoff Carefoot witnessed the unfolding events for himself when, in December, he visited the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Caerlaverock on the Solway:

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/caerlaverock/> .

Geoff comments: *‘The entire Svalbard population of Barnacle geese flock to this small section of the Solway coast to winter there, in large flocks. The maximum count there in November was 12,500. They have already lost more than 1,500, and dead and dying birds are strewn around the reserve. With 10% already dead this truly is a ‘decimation’ and there are still 4 months to run before the survivors depart’.*

Unfortunately, the latest estimate is that over of 30% of the over-wintering Barnacle Goose population has been lost.

### Winter Volunteer Days

It is testament to the commitment and enthusiasm of our volunteers that, despite some very poor weather conditions, all our Winter volunteer days were well attended. No sessions were cancelled due to poor weather and a great deal was accomplished. Our regular volunteers were again joined, on several occasions, by teams of enthusiastic and energetic Cadets from the Lancashire Constabulary and we are extremely appreciative of their continued support of the Wetlands.



Cadets hard at work clearing up the embankments of the Island Lake.

Much of the work undertaken by volunteers followed on from work done in the Autumn, by contractors, when scrub was cleared from the embankments. In particular, the Police Cadets did a great job in removing unwanted material from the embankments. Willow was cut and bundled, grass and other cuttings were raked up and the ‘mats’ of material removed, in order to expose original embankment stonework, have been cleared. The recycling of willow bundles had been well documented – but what about the other waste material?



Trustee Geoff Carefoot leading a team ‘re-purposing’ waste material to form a bed for future rush and reed growth in the Mere.

As ever, Trustee Geoff Carefoot came up with a solution to this particular problem. Under Geoff’s direction, the matted material and rotted-down cuttings were placed in the Mere, just below the Compound Viewing Screens. This will provide the organic material necessary for development of a new area of rushes and reeds.



Volunteers transplanting saplings to the Fen access-point.

Another job that has been undertaken by our volunteers concerns the saplings that were



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planted before the pandemic. When 'whips' are planted, it is not surprising if large numbers fail. Overall, we estimate that 30-40% of the whips failed and this is certainly not uncommon. We have therefore re-located some of the growing saplings into areas where others have been lost (e.g. the pathway to the Fen viewing screens).

One particular problem is that whips can become overwhelmed by scrub and weeds. In order to avoid this we have been placing biodegradable 'weed suppression mats' (squares of old carpet!) around the growing saplings. In addition to keeping weeds at bay, these will also help to ward off over-enthusiastic strimmer and mower operators! It is good to report that some of the whips planted, two or three years ago, are thriving and, in the years to come, we can look forward to a variety of new berry-bearing trees across the Wetlands.

Finally, volunteers have been helping with preparations for the construction of additional Tern rafts. Once again, the rafts will be constructed from 're-purposed' cable drums. In this respect we are particularly grateful to Trustee Steve Whittam who negotiated with 'The Woodhouse' at Ashton (<https://communitywoodrecycling.org.uk/>) to obtain a couple of ideally sized drums for a nominal price. We already have a supply of nesting trays (constructed, as before, by Frank Elliott) and 'buoyancy aids' (from Wetlands supporter, John Cook) and it only remains for the rafts to be assembled and floated out into the Mere – jobs that, ideally, need to be completed before the return of the Terns in the Summer.

### *Fund Raising Activities*

Notwithstanding the difficulties of fund-raising during a pandemic, the Trustees were left open-mouthed with admiration when chief fund-raiser, Andy Small reported that over £9,000 had been raised for the Trust during 2021. Throughout the year, Andy 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.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, sales of the 2022 Wetlands Calendar (nearly 200 sold), special-edition Christmas cards and Wetlands mugs have generated much needed funds for the Trust. Overall, sales of these items, along with the Christmas Click and Collect service and book sales have raised over £1,500. Remember, thanks to our sponsors, every penny raised by the sale of calendars, cards and mugs goes directly to fund work on the Wetlands.



A selection of tools (along with a wheel barrow!) recently purchased for use by volunteers.

We are particularly grateful to two of our long-time supporters - The Plough, Grimsargh and Grimsargh Club. The Plough has, for some time, been selling Wetlands Ale and now sells Wetlands Pies! Each sale generates 20p for the Wetlands. In addition to regularly hosting Andy's book stall, Grimsargh Club has organised a number of special evening events for us. For example, a Race Night held in December raised £200 for the Wetlands.

Donations, gifts and merchandise purchases are so important for the maintenance and development of the Wetlands. Without people's generosity, much of the maintenance work, outlined in this and previous newsletters, would not be possible and we are truly grateful for everyone's continued support.

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### Future Volunteer Days

The schedule of volunteer days is as follows:

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March  
Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

The April sessions will not involve any 'intrusive' work in areas where there may be ground-nesting birds. As always, volunteer sessions start at 10 o'clock, when we meet at the Compound. Generally, we work until about 2 pm in the afternoon; however, people are free to leave as and when they wish. As always, we ask everyone to book onto the volunteer day using the 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 any tools you should, ideally, bring with you.

### Other events



**GRIMSARGH WETLANDS**  
A haven for wildlife



**SPRING GUIDED WALK**

**When:**  
Saturday  
12 March

**Time:**  
10:00am

**Cost:**  
FREE

- ✓ Family morning out
- ✓ Fresh air, nature & exercise
- ✓ Exclusive site access
- ✓ Beautiful flora and fauna
- ✓ Open to all - children must be supervised



Uneven surfaces, not suitable for prams.  
Regrettably, no dogs.

**BOOK ONLINE**  
[grimsarghwetlands.org](https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org)

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, we will be holding a Spring Guided Walk at 10 am (meet at the Compound, opposite Oban Court) on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March. This is an opportunity for you to see areas of the Wetlands not normally open to members of the public. In particular, we will be able to view the beds of Spring flowers that the Wetlands is rightly, renowned for. Of course, timing is everything, and as mentioned earlier in this newsletter, the flowering of wild flowers is becoming somewhat unpredictable. Fingers crossed, we should be able to see plenty of orchids and other Spring flowers. In order to be able to organise walks that offer the best experience for attendees, it is important that you book in advance on our website:

<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/events/events.php>

The walk is expected to last approximately 90 min. and it is important that you dress appropriately (warm, waterproof clothing) and wear appropriate foot-ware for rough and, often, muddy ground. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. Dogs are not permitted at this event and you should be aware that there is no on-site parking.

Finally, although we very much hope that the walk will go ahead as planned, you should be aware that the event is dependent upon there being no restrictions in place regarding either the coronavirus pandemic or the ongoing avian flu outbreak.

Looking further into the future, we anticipate being involved in both the Grimsargh Field day (Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June) and Longridge Show (Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July). We will be providing more details about these events in our next newsletter. It is worth mentioning that we welcome volunteers to help out with our stall and other fund-raising activities at both these events.

We have our Annual General Meeting scheduled for the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> July in Grimsargh Village Hall. Members will be



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circulated with further details in the lead-up to the meeting.

### *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).

### *Acknowledgements*

We thank Gerry Small and Richard Moss 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**