

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Summer 2022



Welcome

Welcome to your Summer Newsletter! This summer represents an important anniversary for the Trust. It is now five years since the Trust gained charitable status and, in September, it will be five years since the Trust made the first call for volunteers to work on the Wetlands. We will be reflecting on these last five years, and looking to the future.

More recently, we successfully completed our Spring work sessions, we held our Spring Guided Walk and we were delighted to welcome children of Grimsargh, St Michael's Primary School on their first Wetlands adventure.

Looking forward, we have a very busy time ahead. For the first time since before the pandemic, we are, like everyone else, looking forward to Grimsargh Field Day and other local outdoor events. We will have a stall at each event so if you are there – do come and say hello! We will be holding our AGM in July and we encourage all members to attend. In addition to hearing about the work of the Trust, this will also be an opportunity to appoint new trustees and thereby shape the future activities of the Trust.

Finally, some of you will be aware that trustee Phil Atkinson has been rather ill. Fortunately, Phil is making a good recovery and we do all send both Phil and Sue our very best wishes. We look forward to seeing Phil out and about on the Wetlands during the Summer months.

We hope you enjoy reading your newsletter.

The Trustees.

Grimsargh St Michael's Primary School Visit



Mrs Todd's class ready to start their walk around the Wetlands (photograph used with permission of Grimsargh St Michael's Primary School).

On Wednesday 2nd March, children from Year 3 (Mrs Todd's class) visited the Wetlands on a rather wet and soggy afternoon. The event, organised by trustee Phil Atkinson, was held in support of the School's focus on 'The Environment of Grimsargh' as part of the more general theme of 'Our changing world – and how we, as citizens, can protect our world and all those that live in it'. Children and teachers were led around the Wetlands by trustees. The children were, of course, completely undeterred by the wet weather and were enthralled by their Wetlands experience. We were delighted to host the children, and look forward to other classes visiting during the coming months.

Remember, if you are responsible for a community group or organisation, you can also arrange for your group to visit the Wetlands. Please see the 'Group Tours' page on our website or email your enquiry directly to the Trust (grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).

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Trustee David Hindle quizzes the children about the Wetlands wildlife (photograph used with permission of Grimsargh St Michael's Primary School).

Spring Guided Walk

On Saturday 12th March we were delighted to welcome members of the public for our first Spring Guided Walk since before the pandemic.



The first group starts off on the Spring Guided Walk (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The walk was fully booked and the springtime sunshine made for an enjoyable couple of hours exploring the Wetlands. Although a little early for seeing the orchids in flower, there was plenty of evidence of them emerging, especially on the embankments of the Mere. There was an abundance of other spring flowers with Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Colt's Foot and Wood Anemone all in evidence. The embankments of the Mere also gave good views of numerous ferns (particularly Hart's Tongue fern) that now flourish where invasive willow has been removed.



The vast beds of Primroses on the embankments of the Mere (photograph by Gerry Small).

The abundance of wild flowers certainly illustrates the value of removing scrub and rank vegetation during the Winter. Also, in this context, there were plenty of vole holes all over the embankments and, with scrub removed, this now makes an ideal hunting ground for the local barn owls (seen hunting, at dusk, during the early weeks of Spring).

The eagle-eyed among the visitors were able to find some of the Wetlands fungi highlighted in our last newsletter. The Scarlet Elf Cup fungi, although a little past their best, were still impressive as were the King Alfred's Cake fungi on trees adjacent to the public footpath.

The walk was judged a great success by all and a number of the visitors were inspired to sign-up, on the spot, for our volunteer sessions!

Spring Volunteer Days

The recent volunteer days gave the opportunity to complete a variety of different tasks before the enforced lay-off (a welcome break for our hard-working volunteers!) of the nesting season. First on the 'to do' list was the maintenance of the saplings that have been planted over the past couple of years. An impressive number of these are growing well; however, there is always the risk that they will be lost amidst encroaching vegetation and brambles. Once vegetation had been cleared, many of the growing saplings were provided with more substantive stakes and 'weed suppression mats' (actually old carpet squares!)

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to give them every chance to thrive. In addition, a group of oak saplings, kindly donated by Derrick Norman of Longridge were planted along the North-facing embankment of the Fen. In years to come, these will form an impressive sight from the public footpath.



Planting oak saplings on the Fen embankment
(photograph by Lesley Walker).

In a major new initiative, led by trustee Steve Whittam, it has been agreed to begin the creation of a small orchard in the sheltered area adjacent to the compound. To this end, an initial group of six native apple tree saplings (eating apples) were planted at our final Spring volunteer day on 24th April. There is room for another dozen, or so, saplings and future planting sessions are envisaged. In addition, it is planned to sow wild flowers (especially Yellow Rattle and Clover) around the saplings, to help keep the grass under control.



Trustee Steve Whittam (left) with the first of the apple tree saplings (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

As reported in our last newsletter, over the Winter, Geoff Carefoot has been preparing a second batch of tern rafts for the Mere. At our volunteer day on 26th March, the new rafts were launched onto the Mere and anchored in place alongside the existing rafts. Once again, many thanks go to Ian Milnes of Knowle Green, who came along with his outboard motor and, in the ideal weather, made short work of deploying the new rafts.



The first of the new tern rafts is deployed.

The observant amongst you may notice that, in the above image, we have a 'new dingy'. Actually, it's the same 'old dingy' given a new coat of paint! Trustee Steve Whittam took the opportunity to treat 'Jasmine' to a 'British Racing Green' finish during a recent dingy maintenance session.

The new rafts were soon found by Black-headed Gulls and, at the time of writing (early May), a number of pairs of gulls are already making good use of the nest trays. Although a pair of terns has returned to the Wetlands (first reported on site at the end of April), it remains to be seen if they will successfully nest. It is not particularly unusual for gulls to make use of nest trays provided for terns and, as any of you who have visited Condor Pool, Condor Green will have seen, terns and gulls do, at times, successfully nest in very close proximity.

The final task, of the Spring, was to install a number of new nest boxes. Most of the new boxes are viewable from the public footpath. They can be seen around the ramp leading from

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the ginnel onto the Causeway footpath and on the Fen close to the Causeway screens.



New nest box on the Wetlands (photograph by Lesley Walker).

Following the placement of the boxes, volunteers reported that, even before they had packed away their tools, Blue Tits were seen inspecting one of the newly installed boxes!

Spring Nature Highlights

As already mentioned, an abundance of wild flowers was seen on our Spring Guided Walk – the only thing missing was a show of orchids in flower. Happily, by the time of our final Spring volunteer day, there was a tremendous display of orchids.



Early Purple Orchids (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The display was much appreciated by the volunteers who have been carefully monitoring and flagging the orchids since January. Trustee Andy Small estimated that there were a total of 530 spikes and flowers, with many more leafing, when he surveyed the site at the beginning of May. This is a tremendous improvement on the numbers recorded in 2021 (just 278 spikes) and is testament to the work done clearing scrub over the Winter months. A point taken up by RSPB Ecologist for Northern England, Gavin Thomas who, following a site visit, tweeted '*clearing encroaching bramble and rank vegetation on the old reservoir bankings is allowing them (the orchids) to spread once more.*'

Of course, Spring is an important time for the birdlife of the Wetlands. Migrating birds often arrive at the Wetlands to rest and feed on their journey to, often distant, breeding grounds. As always, the Whimbrel didn't disappoint and significant numbers could be seen roosting during late April/early May. When recorded as part of the Lancashire-wide co-ordinated Whimbrel roost count there were 68 on 25th April and 76 on 3rd May. These numbers are somewhat lower than the peak recorded in early May 2021 (191); however, they are certainly highly respectable compared with other local counts.



Whimbrel return to the Wetlands (photograph by Richard Moss).

While the Whimbrel can be relied upon to visit the Wetlands every Spring, the same cannot be said for Garganey. It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise when one of these rare migratory ducks

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was seen on the Wetlands at the beginning of April. Geoff Carefoot takes up the story -

'The unseasonal plume of warm winds from North Africa in late March, which brought a dusting of Saharan dust to some parts of the UK also helped some early summer migrants. It soon became obvious that an unprecedented influx of a scarce summer migrant, the Garganey, was underway with reports nationwide.

Local birders were on the lookout for this migratory duck and Trust Chair, David Hindle identified a smart drake early on April 1st. This bird proved to be rather elusive often disappearing under the overhanging vegetation'.

Nonetheless, Geoff Carefoot was lucky enough to photograph this beautiful bird feeding in the shallows below the Compound viewing screens. Geoff's photographic success is a wonderful illustration of the rewards of a stealthy and patient approach to viewing from the screens.



Drake Garganey on the Wetlands (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Geoff continues - *'It was 'dabbling' amongst the floating vegetation recently placed there, from the embankment tops, for such an eventuality!*

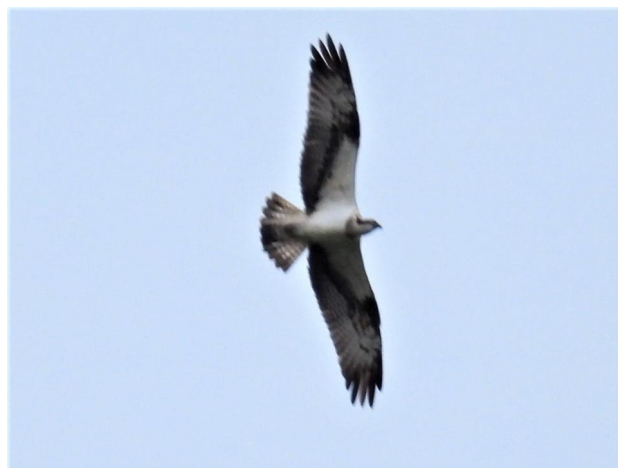
The Garganey is a small duck little larger than a teal (the French know it as the Sarcelle d'ete, the summer teal) which spends much of the year in the Sahel wetlands, principally Senegal and the Niger basin and which makes the perilous journey across (or round) the Sahara and Mediterranean sea to breed in Europe. The handsome drake is easiest identified by its

white supercilium (eyebrow stripe) prominent from quite a distance, and a cascade of distinct scapular feathers over the folded wings.

Eventually some 250 wetlands in the British Isles reported this bird but it was probably only the second time it has been seen at Grimsargh'.

A map of the U.K. sites where Garganey have been recorded this Spring is available here – <https://www.birdguides.com/news/southern-britain-enjoys-garganey-influx/>.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable images captured over the Spring, was that of a distant Osprey over-flying the Wetlands on 3rd April. It was sharp-eyed, Wetlands photographer Gerry Small who was on hand to record the event. It is not unusual for Osprey to overfly the area at this time of year as they return from Africa to their nesting sites in the Lake District and at Kielder Water in Northumberland.



Osprey over-flying the Wetlands (photograph by Gerry Small).

They are very occasionally seen fishing on the Ribble and some of you will, no doubt, recall the sad story of the Osprey that took time out to feed on the Ribble at Brockholes in 2020 (<https://www.birdguides.com/news/m6-osprey-killed-by-lorry/>). You can keep up with the movements and activities of Osprey across the UK at the United Kingdom Ospreys website (<http://ukospreys.uk/index.html>).



Mediterranean Gulls on the Wetlands (photograph by Gerry Small).

A couple of other Spring records are worth mentioning. Regular readers will be aware that small numbers (4-6) of Mediterranean Gull are often seen amongst the much larger numbers of Black-headed Gull that frequent the Wetlands. This March, there was an unprecedented number recorded on and around the Island Lake, culminating in a count of 16 recorded by Trust Chair, David Hindle, before numbers dropped again in April. These numbers do perhaps reflect the fact that this, once rare, gull is now being seen in ever increasing numbers in the U.K.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in early May, a pair of Great Crested Grebes were recorded on the Mere. Great Crested Grebe are not often seen on the Wetlands (although, in many respects, it is an ideal site for them), so this was a welcome record. The fact that the pair have been observed in courtship display offers hope that they will nest – fingers crossed!

Five Year Anniversary of the Wetlands Trust

It is remarkable to think that this summer marks the fifth anniversary of two significant events in the history of the Wetlands. In May 2017, the Trust gained charitable status and it was in September of that same year that the first call for volunteers went out from the Trust. It is worth taking time to reflect on what has been achieved in that time.

Five years ago, the only access point onto the Wetlands was via the ginnel, off Preston Road, opposite Elston Lane. The steps leading up from the ginnel were, at best, difficult. Beyond the Causeway, the ‘footpath’ was little more than a muddy track leading, via a slippery slope, to the stile and the fields beyond the Wetlands. There were no viewing screens, it was simply a case of finding a gap in the embankment vegetation if you wanted to view birdlife. The embankments, particularly those of what is today known as the ‘Island Lake’ were covered in scrub and willow, as was the base of what we now call the ‘Fen’.

Through a combination of volunteer work and grant-funded programmes of work by local contractors, it has been possible to address all the issues described above. In the Summer of 2018, the Trust was awarded a grant for £50,000 from the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF). The award was split into two components. Initial funding allowed us to improve the public footpath and accessibility of the site and this work was successfully completed in late 2018. The second component of funding was for the construction of viewing screens and the creation of a new access point onto the Wetlands (the ‘Compound’ access point, off Preston Road, opposite Oban Court) which was completed in Spring 2020. More recently, a further LEF grant, allowed the creation of additional viewing screens and another access point (the ‘Fen Access Point’) off Preston Road, opposite the new Story Homes Development, Elston Park.

It is no exaggeration to say that the LEF funded work has transformed the site and dramatically improved the experience for those visiting the Wetlands. Of course, hand in hand with grant-funded work, projects supported by our own fund-raising activities, and the generosity of the local community, have been completed thanks to the combined efforts of volunteers and contractors. In particular, the clearance of scrub and willow from the site has required a major (and continuing) effort; however, the benefits of

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doing this work, as outlined earlier in this newsletter, are clear for all to see.

Other work to improve habitat quality and diversity on the site, supported by a grant from the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity, included the installation of a small sluice and the re-profiling of the islands on the Island Lake in Winter 2020. The installation of the sluice greatly improved our ability to control water levels and thereby provide a much more attractive environment for waders and other water birds.

Looking forward, it is clear that in addition to the on-going need to keep scrub and other vegetation in check, the most immediate (next five years) issue is the Fen. Ideally, we want to achieve an environment that encourages the expansion of the existing, relatively small, *Phragmites* reed bed, but discourages, as much as possible, the spread of willow. Being able to maintain an appropriate level of moisture in the Fen is a, not unrelated, issue.



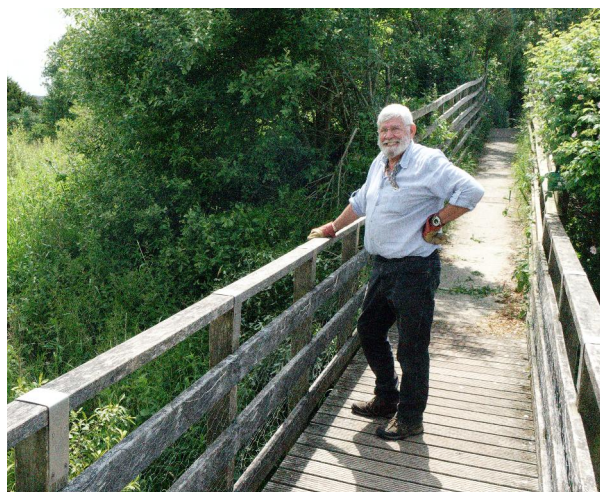
Strimming willow in the Fen (photograph by Lesley Walker).

Aside from the work on the site itself, the Trust has also transformed other areas of its activities. In particular, compared with five years ago, we now have a very significant 'online presence' with a professionally developed (and still evolving) website along with extremely busy and popular social media accounts (Facebook [@grimsarghwetlands](https://www.facebook.com/grimsarghwetlands) and Twitter [@GrimsarghWT](https://twitter.com/GrimsarghWT)).

This brief review of the Trust's achievements over the last five years illustrates the fact that, irrespective of the challenges we now face, we can be confident about the continued management and development of the Wetlands. Inevitably, as a Trust, we will face funding challenges; however, the diversity of our current fundraising activities and our willingness to explore new funding opportunities, makes us well placed to meet these challenges.

Changes at the Trust

Some of you may already be aware that Geoff Carefoot recently retired as a trustee. Regular readers of this newsletter will be very much aware of the contribution Geoff has made to many of the projects we have undertaken in the last five years. As a skilled project leader, with a distinctive 'can-do' attitude to the required work, Geoff has been a key factor in the successful development of the Wetlands and, as such, we all owe him an immense debt of gratitude for all his efforts.



Geoff taking a break from work on the Wetlands.

Although stepping down from his current role with the Trust, Geoff will continue to join us at our regular volunteer sessions and other events, where his vast experience and insight will be much appreciated by all of us. In addition, as a renowned local ornithologist and skilled photographer, Geoff will continue to record the Wetlands birdlife on his regular visits.

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Of course, Geoff's retirement (alongside another relatively long-standing vacancy) means that the Trust is now hoping to appoint up to two new trustees. Those of you who are members and/or registered volunteers will already have received separate email notification regarding the search for new trustees along with outline 'role descriptions' for the posts. As indicated earlier in this newsletter, any appointments will need to be confirmed at the AGM and we do hope as many members as possible will be able to attend and participate in the appointment process.

Fund Raising Activities

Regular readers will know that fund-raising is an on-going, year-round activity. Indeed, Trustee Andy Small recently estimated that over £900 has already been raised this year. Having said that, there is no doubt that the summer months are key. This is especially so this year when, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, there will be a full range of community events and we plan to attend them all. You can see full details of these events on our 'Fundraising Days' page of our website. The key dates for your diary are as follows:

Queen's Jubilee Picnic – Sunday 5th June
Longridge Field Day – Saturday 11th June
Grimsargh Field Day - Saturday 25th June
Longridge Show - Saturday 9th July

It is worth mentioning that we welcome volunteers to help out with our stall and other fund-raising activities at these events, particularly at Grimsargh Field Day. These events do represent a wonderful opportunity to find out about the work of the Trust and to meet trustees and volunteers. So, if you are there, do come along and say hello (and maybe buy a raffle ticket or two!).

Other events

We currently have no volunteer days scheduled for the summer months. However, work still needs to be done on site. Registered volunteers

will be emailed when specific help is needed, perhaps for just a couple of hours in the evenings.

We have our Annual General Meeting scheduled for the evening of 20th July in Grimsargh Village Hall at 7.30 pm. Members will be circulated with further details in the lead-up to the meeting.

Looking further ahead, we plan to hold a "Butterfly Walk" on Saturday 6th August and a "Five Year Anniversary Family Walk and Party" on Saturday 3rd September. Please check the website for more details about each of these events.

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

We thank Geoff Carefoot, Gerry Small, Richard Moss, Lesley Walker, Jayne Woollam and Grimsargh St Michael's Primary School 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.

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