

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Autumn 2022



Welcome

Welcome to your Autumn newsletter. It's been a very busy summer for us all with a number of local groups visiting the Wetlands, organised walks for all to see the Wetlands at its summer best and, of course, the Wetlands stall has been busy at a number of local events. You can read all about these various activities here.

Of course, our thoughts are now turning to Autumn and the return of our regular volunteer days. As always, notwithstanding the work carried out by volunteers at our *ad hoc* summer evening work sessions, there is much to be done. We do encourage as many of you as possible to come along to our Autumn weekend volunteer work sessions. Even if you can only manage an hour or two, your help will be greatly appreciated. We anticipate that the upcoming sessions will see a further return to 'normality' with drinks and refreshments available for all. We have all the necessary tools on site, you just need to come along ready and eager to 'get stuck in'.

Finally, we are delighted to announce that we have appointed two new trustees. For some time the trustee team has been understrength; however, we now have a full complement of trustees. The new trustees will greatly improve our ability to manage and maintain the Wetlands and you can read more about the new appointees in this newsletter.

We look forward to seeing you out and about on the Wetlands in the weeks to come and we do hope you enjoy reading your newsletter.

The Trustees.

Bird Flu update



We have previously highlighted the outbreak of avian influenza (bird flu) that has, for over 12 months, ravaged the UK wild bird population. Sadly, it is only now that the full impact of the outbreak is beginning to become clear and we do now face the very real possibility that some species will become extinct in the UK and elsewhere. Seabird colonies around the Scottish coasts have been particularly badly affected with unprecedented numbers of dead and dying birds all too evident. Great Skuas have died in large numbers across Shetland and the Orkneys. As Trust Chair, David Hindle, recently commented *"It looks as though upwards of a third of the world population of Great Skuas has died in UK breeding colonies so far this summer, and breeding success has been consequently very low"*.

Large numbers of dead gannets have also been seen on and around the sea cliffs (e.g. Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth) where they nest. In England, and elsewhere, there is plenty of evidence that the disease is spreading through tern populations, with many Common and Sandwich Terns reported dead at the RSPB Minsmere Reserve and elsewhere. Similar losses have been reported across Northern Europe with many thousands of Sandwich Terns succumbing in France and the Netherlands. Sadly, the UK's only breeding colony of the

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rare Roseate Tern, on Coquet Island in Northumberland, has also been decimated.

Locally, we have, to date, been relatively lucky. Nonetheless, the risk of infection remains, officially classified, as HIGH and we all need to be vigilant, as highlighted by the British Trust for Ornithology's on-going poster campaign (<http://bto.org/avian-flu>).

A reminder, please do not touch any dead or sick birds with your bare hands. It is worth reiterating that there is believed to be a very low risk that avian influenza can be transmitted to people by feeding birds in the garden. That said, the single most important action we can take, to protect both the birds that feed in our gardens and ourselves, is to follow basic hygiene guidelines. Always, after handling bird feeders, cleaning bird baths or feeding birds, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. In addition, bird feeders should be washed and cleaned regularly with dilute disinfectant (normal household bleach diluted 1:20) to prevent spread of diseases.

Alien Invader

We have become used to invasive plant species causing problems on our waterways, be it the Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam that now grow in abundance along the banks of the River Ribble or the Floating Pennywort that is now such a problem on our local canals. Here on the Wetlands we have a more unusual alien species, a fully grown Terrapin (most likely a Red-eared or Yellow-bellied Slider) has been confirmed on the Mere. These non-native species are released into the wild by their owners who must be completely unaware of the damage that can result for native populations. Terrapins are voracious predators and eat newts, frogs, insect larvae, birds eggs and chicks and can have an incredibly damaging impact on the local ecology.

Clearly the appearance of terrapin(s?) on the Wetlands is very bad news and we would urge people not to release unwanted terrapins anywhere into the wild – where they can find

their way into local water courses. Unfortunately, there is a common misconception that terrapins will simply not survive frosts etc. This is simply not the case, as the now thriving populations on local canals, and elsewhere, make clear.



Terrapin on the Wetlands (photograph by Gerry Small).

Scouts and Beavers on the Wetlands

Over the summer, we were delighted to welcome local groups of scouts and beavers onto the Wetlands. 1st Grimsargh Scouts visited the Wetlands on 21st June. The scouts worked hard trimming brambles and nettles on the public footpath and raking grass in the orchard. Notwithstanding some pretty severe cases of hay fever, the scouts clearly enjoyed their evening working toward their environmental badges and learning about the wildlife of the Wetlands. We were particularly impressed by their enthusiastic team work and we are truly grateful to them for their practical support of the Wetlands.



1st Grimsargh Scouts working in the Orchard.

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On 29th June, it was the turn of 1st Grimsargh Beavers to visit the Wetlands for a guided walk. The youngsters thoroughly enjoyed their Wetlands adventure and had a marvellous time watching and learning about the Wetlands wildlife. The only disappointment was that the young Tawny Owls that had been showing so well earlier in the day were absent from their usual roosting sites in the trees along the public footpath.



Beavers and their supervisors making use of the Wetlands viewing screens (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

Grimsargh Field Day



Getting ready for the Field Day Parade.

For the first time in three years, there was a full range of local outdoor summer events with Longridge Field Day, Longridge Show and Grimsargh Field Day all taking place. Grimsargh Wetlands was represented at each of these events with the undoubted highlight being Grimsargh Field Day on Saturday 25th June. The day started with the parade from the Village Hall to the park and it was amazing to see so

many people flocking to make their donations to our 'bucket shakers', warden Neil Hartley and trustee, Andy Small.



The mysterious polar explorers taking part in the parade in support of Grimsargh Wetlands.

Mystery still surrounds the identity of the team of polar explorers, complete with fully kitted out sledge, that joined us in the parade! The group, also seen at a number of other local events, were walking and 'shaking buckets' in support of the Wetlands and we are tremendously grateful for their efforts – particularly on such a warm summer's day.



Finishing touches to the Wetlands stalls before the crowds arrive.

After the parade, we had our stalls on the park and notwithstanding a couple of very sharp showers, we did brisk business all afternoon with people queuing to take part in our raffle and games. Alongside these fund-raising activities there were plenty of opportunities for people to talk with volunteers and trustees about the work we do on the Wetlands. The day was a

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great success, with over £300 raised in support of the Wetlands and a number of new volunteers and supporters recruited. We thank all who supported us and helped out with the parade and the stalls. All in all a great day out and a welcome return for the Field Day after the lockdowns and restrictions of recent years.

Volunteer Evenings

Although we did not have any formal volunteer days during the summer months, there were certainly plenty of jobs that needed to be done on the Wetlands. Trustee Jayne Wollam, therefore set about organising some impromptu short evening work sessions in July and August. This was done in order to try and get some of the most pressing work done. These evening sessions were incredibly successful and really well supported by people – despite so many other summer distractions.



Trustee Steve Whittam hard at work strimming the rampant summer vegetation (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

Work was done cutting and clearing pathways through the summer vegetation and, in particular, clearing the areas by the viewing screens. The Fen access point and viewing screens were in particular need of attention. As you will know, there is major building work being undertaken adjacent to the Fen access point and it has, over recent months, been difficult to gain access at that point. Hopefully,

once that building work is complete, both wildlife and visitors will return to that area to enjoy the quiet of the Fen.



Before and after images of the Fen access point and viewing screens after one of our evening work sessions (photographs by Jayne Woollam).

Butterfly Walk



Butterfly recorders assemble before the count (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The wildlife highlight of the summer was anticipated to be the 'Butterfly Walk' we organised on 6th August. The walk was held in support of 'The Big Butterfly Count' promoted by Butterfly Conservation

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(<https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/>). Over 20 members of the public came along and spent the morning surveying butterflies and other insect life of the Wetlands. In truth, although butterflies were seen, the overall counts were disappointing. The weather (overcast) was not ideal for hunting, or photographing, butterflies; nonetheless a good time was had by all and there were a number of interesting observations. Perhaps the most striking find was an Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillar.



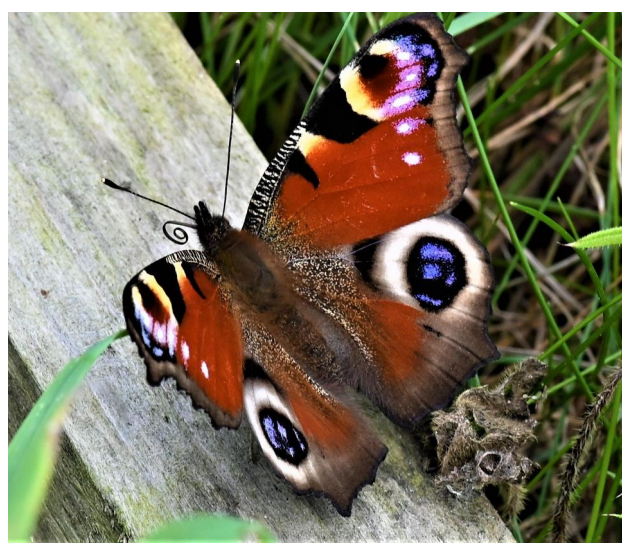
Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillar, which is said to bear some resemblance to an elephant's trunk(!), is one of our largest and most distinctive caterpillars and is perhaps the most often seen hawk-moth caterpillar. The distinctive 'eye-like' markings serve to dissuade predators from attacking by making the, already large, caterpillar seem even bigger than it actually is.

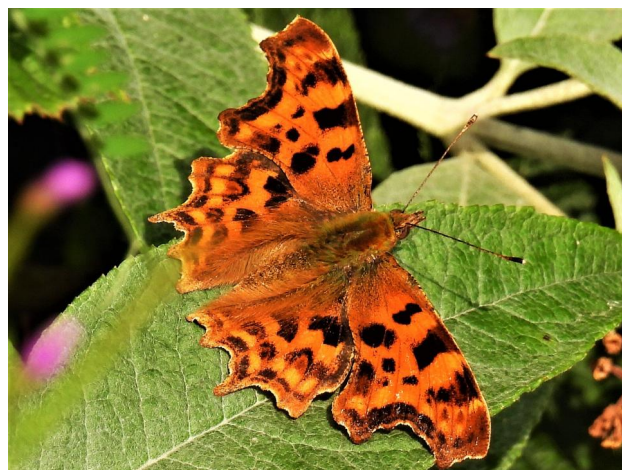
Although only a 'snapshot' in less than ideal weather, the relatively low numbers of butterflies seen really do highlight the whole point of Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count project. As you may know, many of the UK's butterfly species are in steep decline, with an estimated increase of 26% of species now in danger of extinction. Specifically, of 62 species assessed, 4 are now extinct with 24 classed as threatened and a further 5 as near-threatened.

Sadly, this means that British butterflies are some of the most threatened in Europe. As always, the major factors in the decline in numbers are listed as changing land use and, inevitably, climate change with those butterflies in decline being species that favour cooler and/or damper environments.

Finally, on a more positive note, it was good to see that, just a few days before our walk, under much more favourable weather conditions, Wetlands photographer, Gerry Small did capture some superb images of Wetlands butterflies.



Wetlands Peacock butterfly, in pristine condition (photograph by Gerry Small).



Another pristine Wetlands butterfly - a Comma (photograph by Gerry Small).

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Summer Avian Highlights



Osprey (photograph by Richard Moss).

Summer, is of course, not the best time of year for recording avian highlights. Nonetheless, our Wetlands photographers have persevered and obtained a number of notable images. In early June, Wetlands photographer Richard Moss captured a remarkable sequence of images of an Osprey as it over-flew the Wetlands. Needless to say, the Osprey was only a fleeting visitor.



Wood Sandpiper (photograph by Gerry Small).

In contrast, a slightly longer staying visitor, from early June, was a very obliging Wood Sandpiper that spent a lot of time exploring the exposed mud just in front of the Island Lake Screens, thereby providing plenty of opportunities for our photographers over several days.

During the summer, the Fen, is home to a variety of warblers. The problem can be to get good views of them in the summer vegetation.

Fellow photographers will appreciate the effort needed to obtain the image of a Sedge Warbler that Wetlands photographer, Gerry Small took in early June. The usual outcome is an image of a bird almost completely obscured by reeds and vegetation – so an unobscured view is truly notable!



Sedge Warbler (photograph by Gerry Small).

New Trustees

As reported in our last newsletter, the trustees were hoping to make new appointments. We are delighted to announce that the two vacant positions have now been filled and the trustee team is therefore back at full-strength.



New trustee John Willan at work in the Orchard.

The first appointment to be made was that of John Willan. Many of you will be very familiar with John and, in particular, his sterling work in organising Grimsargh Field Day. What you may not know, is that John has a very long history of

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involvement with the site we now know as the Wetlands. John was an employee of the then North West Water Authority (now United Utilities) and worked on maintenance of the Grimsargh Reservoirs estate. John's unique, and intimate, knowledge of the site makes him an incredibly valuable asset to the Trust.

At the moment, John is undertaking a Degree in Ecology and Conservation Management and his volunteer work on the Wetlands (and with the Ribble Rivers Trust) is a major component of his degree studies.

More recently, we were delighted to appoint one of our stalwart volunteers as a trustee. Alan Sargent has, along with his family, been a familiar face at our post-lockdown volunteer sessions and has quickly taken on a leadership role in both formal and the more informal work sessions and projects.

Alan, now resident in Longridge, but born and raised in Grimsargh, will be a tremendous asset to the Trust, especially following the departure of former trustee, Geoff Carefoot. Alan often worked closely with Geoff and is therefore well placed to carry on project work and lead volunteer sessions in the coming months.



New Trustee Alan Sargent (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

Autumn Volunteer Day Schedule

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.

The schedule is as follows:

Saturday 10th September
Sunday 25th September
Saturday 8th October
Sunday 23rd October
Saturday 5th November
Sunday 20th November
Saturday 10th December

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 Jayne Woollam, Richard Moss and Gerry Small 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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