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# **Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter**



**Winter 2022**

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## **Welcome**

Welcome to your latest newsletter. As most of you are probably aware, the recent weeks have been very difficult for the Trust. Given the scale of the national outbreak of avian influenza ('bird flu'), it was perhaps inevitable that cases would occur on the Wetlands. It was, nonetheless, shocking to see the consequences of this dreadful disease on our Wetlands birdlife.

Inevitably, the outbreak of avian influenza has impacted upon the work done by volunteers and contractors and, coming after all the disruption resulting from the pandemic, this has been particularly disappointing. At the time of writing, trustees have agreed that, with appropriate measures in place, volunteer work can now recommence in a way that is both safe for workers and minimises the risk of spreading the disease to other birdlife both on the Wetlands and elsewhere.

It is worth mentioning, that the public access areas of the Wetlands remain open and we welcome all visitors. Please do take note of our signage, particularly regarding the advice about not touching any dead or sick birds. Finally, it is, more than ever, important that dogs are kept on leads when being walked on the public footpath.

Notwithstanding the problems with avian influenza, there are certainly 'good news' stories to report and we hope you enjoy reading about them here. Finally, we wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

The Trustees

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## **Fifth Anniversary Walk**

The summer of 2022 marked the fifth anniversary of two significant events in the history of the Wetlands. In May 2017, the Trust gained charitable status and, in September of that same year, the first call for volunteers went out.

Since that time, a great deal has been achieved. 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 and much of the 'footpath' was little more than a muddy track leading, via a slippery slope, to a stile and the fields beyond. There were no viewing screens and the embankments were covered in scrub and willow.

Through a combination of work done by volunteers and grant-funded programmes of work by local contractors, it has been possible to address all these issues. It is no exaggeration to say that generous grant support from the Lancashire Environmental Fund has transformed the site and dramatically improved the experience for those visiting the Wetlands. 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.

The Trust marked the occasion of its fifth anniversary with a guided walk of the Wetlands on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September. We were delighted that the Trust's Patron, Lord Horum of Grimsargh was able to attend the event.



Trustees with Lord Horum (second from right) at the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary guided walk.

Before the walk, Lord Horum welcomed visitors to the Wetlands and spoke about the development of the site over the last five years. He commented that: *"Grimsargh Wetlands is a great asset to the village. Its purpose, of course, is to provide a sanctuary for birds and wildlife in an area of natural flora and fauna. That in itself would make its preservation and development worthwhile in an increasingly built-up society. But its position at the very heart of the village (almost opposite the village hall) gives it added value because it helps to develop the village community spirit. Volunteer workers find it easy to access, conducted group walks can be organized and local children can be taken on supervised walks and learn something about nature. There is a great spin-off in community activity. In short, it adds a whole extra dimension to the life of the village. I think the birds and wildlife like it too! As someone who was proud to be born in the village and remembers the Wetlands when they were simply a group of rather forbidding reservoirs, it is a truly amazing development. It has been five years in the making, and I am sure that the next five years will see it develop further"*.

Lord Horum concluded by presenting the Trust with a cheque in support of its work. Needless to say, the Trust was delighted to receive such a generous donation and is immensely grateful to Lord Horum for his continuing support. The donation will go a long way in helping to fund the further development of the Wetlands.



Visitors hunting for grasshoppers during the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary guided walk (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The guided walk was attended by nearly 30 members of the public and everyone had the chance to enjoy the best of the late summer Wetlands. There was an abundance of insects on show with good numbers of butterflies and dragonflies seen throughout the walk. The highlight of the walk, for some of the younger visitors, was trying to keep track of the numerous grasshoppers found around the Compound! Visitors were also able to sample our first crop of Wetlands eating apples grown in our fledgling orchard.

### Ash Dieback on the Wetlands



A volunteer removes another victim of ash dieback from along the footpath.

When our Volunteer Days recommenced in September, one of our first jobs was to make safe a number of dead or diseased ash trees along the public footpath. The trees had succumbed to ash dieback, a disease which is now widespread across the U.K.



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Ash dieback is caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*. This fungus originated from north-east Asia where it causes little damage to its natural hosts, Manchurian Ash and Chinese Ash. In contrast, it leads to the rapid decline of the European Ash, a fact which only became apparent after the fungus appeared in Europe some 30 years ago. Introduction into the U.K. was probably the result of importation of infected ash saplings from Europe - a practice that was, rather belatedly, banned in 2012.

The fungus overwinters in ash leaf litter. Small white fruiting bodies appear during the summer months and these eventually release spores into the air. When the spores come into contact with healthy trees they can penetrate into the leaves. The fungus then grows inside the tree, thereby compromising the tree's water and nutrient transport systems, ultimately leading to the death of the tree.

Although there may be some genetic tolerance in the U.K.'s ash population, it is estimated that perhaps some 80% of the population will eventually be lost. Nationally, this is going to have a devastating impact on our landscape and biodiversity.

Regarding ash dieback on the Wetlands, we will continue to remove dead trees where there are specific health and safety issues (e.g. along the public footpath). If you have walked along the footpath recently, you will have seen that where trees have died, they are generally cut down to 'head height' thereby retaining some 'cover' along the walkway.

### *Other Work on Site*

Aside from the work described above, there has, as a consequence of avian influenza, been little opportunity to complete a great deal of work. Fortunately, two tasks were possible. Volunteers did a considerable amount of work in the Orchard, cutting grass back in preparation for planting another batch of fruit tree saplings.



*Volunteers at work in the Orchard.*

Also, the intention is to introduce some Yellow Rattle in an effort to encourage the growth of more wild flowers in the Orchard. Yellow Rattle is a semi-parasitic wild flower, often used in 'meadow creation' projects. It parasitises grasses, thereby impeding their growth and giving other wild flowers the chance to flourish. Additionally, Yellow Rattle is attractive to pollinators such as bumble bees and butterflies. Some care does need to be taken in sowing Yellow Rattle as it has been reported to compromise the growth of certain other wild flowers (e.g. Bird's Foot Trefoil); however, in areas of particularly rich growth of grasses (such as the Orchard), the advantages probably outweigh any disadvantages. Hopefully, as the Yellow Rattle establishes, the grass will thin out and plants like Oxeye Daisy, knapweeds and vetches will appear.



*Contractors at work on the embankments.*

Although only limited work by volunteers was possible, we were extremely fortunate that contractors were able to complete the annual

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'haircut' of the embankments. As before, Wilkinson Landscaping, based in Hothersall, used their specialist equipment to clear scrub from the embankments, a task they completed in just a few days. Clearing so much scrub should mean that there will be much better opportunities for wild flowers to flourish on the embankments.



*The freshly cut embankment of the Mere.*

In addition to clearing the embankments, a large area of the Fen 'basin' was cleared of scrub and the, ever problematic, invasive willow. This work was important for a number of reasons. It is remarkable just how much water the willow consumes. This has the undesirable effect of drying out the Fen and compromising the growth and spread of the Phragmites reed bed. Removing the willow should reduce this water loss thereby keeping the area wetter for longer throughout the year. This should also help with the retention of water in the recently created wildlife ponds in the Fen.



*The basin of the Fen cleared of invasive willow.*

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## Visit by the Lancashire Environmental Fund

We were delighted to welcome the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF) to Grimsargh for their 'Annual Event' – the first such gathering since 2019, before the start of the pandemic. Around 50 delegates, many from key local and national conservation organisations, attended the event in Grimsargh Village Hall on 27<sup>th</sup> October.



*Delegates hearing about LEF-funded projects (photograph by Jayne Woollam).*

During the morning, there were a series of presentations on some of the many projects that the LEF have supported in recent years. David Hindle and Jayne Woollam attended the event on behalf of the Trust and gave brief presentations on the history of the Wetlands and our plans for the future. After a 'hotpot lunch', delegates were invited to visit the Wetlands and see, for themselves, the impact of LEF's generous funding of the site.



*Trust chair, David Hindle (left) with LEF delegates at the Wetlands viewing screens (photograph by Jayne Woollam).*



**Autumnal Highlights**

*Shieldbug Records* - Shieldbugs are some of our most striking insects – especially when targeted by an experienced macro photographer. Before the wet weather set in, photographer Gerry Small took the opportunity to catalogue the Wetlands shieldbug population and was rewarded with some stunning images.



*Common Green Shieldbug (4<sup>th</sup> instar nymph – photograph by Gerry Small).*

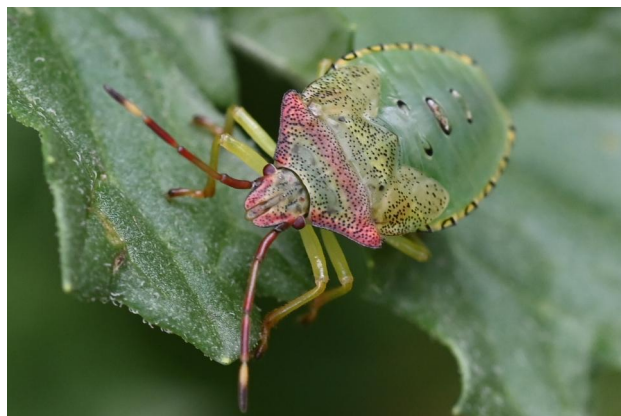
Shieldbugs (or stinkbugs - so named for the noxious fluids they excrete to deter predators – although, in this respect, the British species are the least offensive) are characterised by their relatively large, flat bodies and are often seen slowly moving around on leaves. They are ‘true’ bugs (along with water boatmen, pond skaters and aphids) and feed on plant sap.



*Common Green Shieldbug (final/5<sup>th</sup> instar nymph – photograph by Gerry Small).*

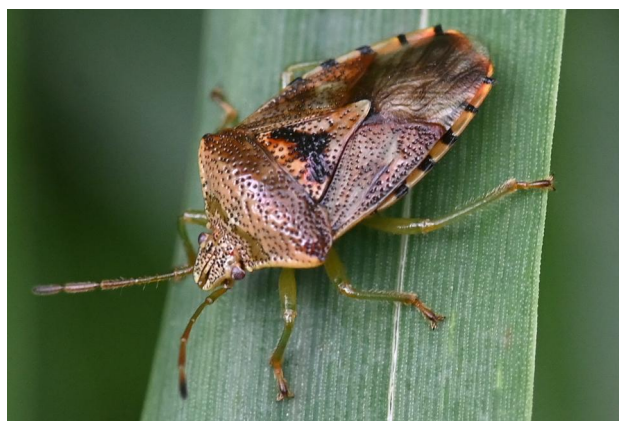
An important characteristic is that their young, known as nymphs, are small wingless versions

of the adult that go through a series of moults (or instars) before the fully developed adult is seen. There are some 33 British species of shieldbug, one of the commonest of which is the Common Green Shieldbug, often found on blackberries or raspberries.



*Hawthorn Shieldbug (final/5<sup>th</sup> instar nymph - photograph by Gerry Small).*

The Hawthorn Shieldbug is the U.K.'s largest species and mostly feeds on hawthorn berries and leaves. In contrast, the adult Parent Bug feeds mainly on birch or alder sap. It is a medium sized shieldbug mostly coloured brown, darkening to red-brown in places. The upper half of the central, triangular, 'shield' is usually black and the edges of the abdomen are chequered.



*Parent Bug (Adult - photograph by Gerry Small).*

*Autumnal Fungi* - It was perhaps inevitable that, after such a dry and often hot summer, the autumnal months would be warm and wet. These conditions are ideal for fungi and the last few weeks have seen some remarkable displays

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of fungi on the Wetlands. As ever, photographer Gerry Small was on hand to capture images of the remarkable diversity of fungi that were seen. Just a few of his many images are shown here.



*Common Puffball mushroom (photograph by Gerry Small).*

Common puffball (also known as Devils Snuffbox or Wolf Farts! - the scientific family name is Lycoperdon - Lyco meaning wolf and perdon meaning burst of wind...) is a common mushroom seen in the late summer and autumn. The fruiting bodies are characterised by numerous small pyramidal shaped 'warts'. Historically, spores released from the mature fruiting bodies were used to staunch blood loss (e.g. nose bleeds) or, when 'puffed' onto burns, to aid healing. However, the spores can cause intense irritation of the eyes and, if inhaled, can lead to the lung disease Lycoperdonosis, so care needs to be taken when handling the mature fungi.

As a group, the puffball mushroom are tremendously important in maintaining the health and ecology of woodlands where they are particularly adept at breaking down and decomposing even the toughest woody material - without them we would be overwhelmed by fallen trees!

A broad group of fungi that are major decomposers of woody material are the crust fungi. They are found, throughout the year, on

the bark of living trees or on fallen branches and, sometimes, in leaf litter.



*Crust fungi (photograph by Gerry Small).*

Crust fungi show a diverse range of colouration and it can be particularly difficult to confirm identification of individual species as similar looking crust fungi may not always be closely related.



*Amethyst deceiver (photograph by Gerry Small).*

The strikingly coloured Amethyst Deceiver is another common mushroom, of the summer and autumn months, usually found growing in leaf litter near Oak or Beech trees. The colours tend to fade in dry weather so the recent wet conditions have ensured that it has been seen at its best. In appearance, especially as the colours fade, it is rather similar to the highly poisonous Lilac Fibrecap. Although the Amethyst Deceiver is not toxic in itself – there is certainly a health warning associated with it - given its



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tendency to take up any arsenic from the surrounding environment.



*Shaggy Inkcap (photograph by Gerry Small).*

The Shaggy Inkcap (also known as Lawyer's Wig or Shaggy Mane) is a widespread and unmistakable fungus – with its tall, white, shaggy cap. As it matures, the cap gradually opens out into a bell shape. It is common in numerous locations, often growing in small groups. If picked, the mushroom has a very short 'shelf-life' turning to nothing more than a black ink stain in just a few hours. Historically (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries), ink was sometimes made from these inkcap fluids (boiled with phenol – as a preservative) and was reputed to be used for printing legal documents or bank notes.

Finally, it is worth remembering that some common fungi can be extremely poisonous. Unless you are an expert, it is always best to simply take a photograph and leave the fungi where they are.

*Avian Highlights.* Without doubt, the autumnal avian highlight was the regular appearance of a Kingfisher on the Wetlands. The patient observer was rewarded with some stunning, close-up views of this unmistakable bird. Our photographers took the opportunity to record the appearance of this, sometimes, elusive bird. Wetlands photographer, Richard Moss 'hit the headlines' when his wonderful images of the bird caught the attention of *Lancs Live* who ran an article on his sighting.

(<https://www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/stunning-kingfisher-seen-grimsargh-wetlands-25175198>) .



*Wetlands Kingfisher (photograph by Richard Moss).*

### *Fund Raising Activities*

Notwithstanding the current economic situation, people continue to amaze us with their generosity. Trustee Andy Small has estimated that, at the time of writing, over £2000 has been given, by the local community, so far this year. A special thanks goes to all those people who have donated books, 'bric a brac' and other goods for sale at our regular Farmers' Market and *Grimsargh Club* stalls.

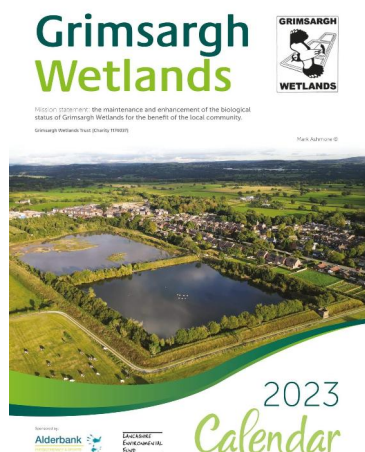
In another example of people's generosity, a collection taken at the *The Plough*, on the evening of their Bonfire and Firework Display, raised over £150 for the Wetlands. Many thanks go to Chris and Kelly, proprietors of *The Plough* for their continuing, passionate support of the Wetlands. Thanks also go to Jaz at the *Premier Grimsargh Village Store* for allowing us to place a collection box in the store. This has already accounted for over £50 in donations.

In the lead up to Christmas, our Wetlands 2023 Calender is available for purchase – at exactly the same price as last year - £6. The key thing to remember about the calendar, is that every penny of the purchase price goes directly to support the work done on the Wetlands. This is possible because of the generosity of our

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sponsors. Their contributions cover all the production costs of the calendar and we are tremendously grateful for their continuing support.



The calendar is available to buy online (<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/shop/index.php>). It is also being sold at the *Premier Grimsargh Village Store*, *Blue Moon Computers* in Longridge, and the *Alderbank Physiotherapy and Sports Injuries Clinic*, Grimsargh. Copies are also available at our regular stall at *Grimsargh Club*, Grimsargh.



Woollen hats and hair bands available now at our stalls  
(photograph by Sue Atkinson).

Also available, in the run up to Christmas, are a special selection of woollen hats and hair bands knitted by volunteer Sue Atkinson using wool donated by trustee, Andy Small. These are available, for a simple donation, at our stalls. We are tremendously appreciative of Sue's efforts that, once again, illustrate the many

ways in which volunteers can use their skills in support of the Wetlands!

### *Winter Volunteer Day Schedule*

As already mentioned, we have agreed to recommence volunteer work sessions. When and where we work depend on our regular risk assessments in relation to the national and local situations regarding avian influenza. Our priorities are to ensure that work can take place in a way that is both safe for workers and minimises the risk of spreading the disease to other birdlife on the Wetlands and elsewhere.

Work 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 our online booking system (<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/events/volunteer-days.php>).

If you register as a volunteer, you will be sent email reminders containing detailed information about both the work planned for the day, any tools you should, ideally, bring with you and any special measures in place in relation to avian influenza (e.g. use of disinfectant boot washes). The proposed schedule is as follows:

Saturday 7th January  
Sunday 29th January  
Saturday 11th February  
Sunday 26th February

### *Membership information*

Membership information is available on 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)). Any general queries about the work of the Trust should be sent to [grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com](mailto:grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).



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**Acknowledgements**

We thank Jayne Woollam, Sue Atkinson, 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 2023 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar and on our website. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1174037.

**LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND**