
Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter



Spring 2024

Welcome

Welcome to your latest newsletter. During the winter months, a great deal of work has been done on the Wetlands and you can read all about it in this newsletter. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our loyal volunteers who have faithfully attended work sessions throughout the winter months, often in less than ideal conditions. Visiting groups and contractors contribute to the upkeep of the Wetlands but, overwhelmingly, it is members of the local community that maintain the site for all who visit the Wetlands.

Of course, the most visible aspect of volunteer work is the physical activity involved in maintenance of the site; however, there is far more to it than that. We have volunteers who ensure we are never short of refreshments and snacks at our work sessions. Others faithfully record sightings on the Wetlands, be it the birdlife, the mapping of orchids or the abundance of butterflies and other insects during the summer months. Volunteers are always on hand to help with guided walks and other events. Our website and social media activities are all maintained by volunteers.

We thank every one of our volunteers for their many and varied efforts in support of the Wetlands. Without volunteers, a community-based project such as ours would not flourish. Finally, there is always a need for new volunteers - *many hands make light work*. So, if you can contribute your time and skills, please do consider signing up as a volunteer. Your efforts will always be greatly appreciated.

The Trustees

Visit by Fylde Rangers



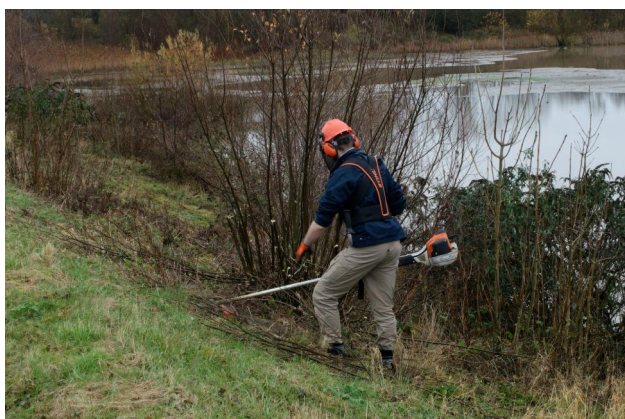
Collecting willow for use in wreath-making workshops.

Regular readers will know that we have a long-standing relationship with the Fylde Ranger Service (<https://www.facebook.com/FyldeRangerService/>) who, among other things, have responsibility for the sand dunes along the Fylde Coast. Many of you will be familiar with the on-going Christmas tree planting project that is helping to restore and expand the width of the sand dune system (<https://www.lancswt.org.uk/christmas-tree-planting-2024>).

A group from the Fylde Rangers visited in late November. They cut willow for use in their popular, pre-Christmas, wreath-making classes. Of course, given the issues we have with invasive willow, we are always more than happy for others to make use of our willow in this way. Perhaps, more importantly for us, the group were able to use their strimmers and other equipment to carry out some essential maintenance work on our embankments. They were able to make 'short work' of scrub along the south-facing embankment of the Mere. Of course, the significance of this scrub clearance is that it gives every chance for Primroses, Early Purple Orchids and other wildflowers to

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emerge in the early spring. The wonderful display of orchids in the spring of 2023 is testament to the importance of this winter scrub clearance work and we are grateful to the Fylde Rangers for their efforts. The group also made real inroads into some of the larger willow that are infiltrating the Phragmites (Common Reed) in the north-east corner of the Island Lake.



A member of the Fylde Rangers team tackling willow on the embankments of the Island Lake.

The day was a real success and we are grateful for the group's continued support of the Wetlands. We look forward to seeing them again next winter.

Winter Walk



The Winter Walk party – dressed for the weather!

Notwithstanding the dreary and damp weather, a small group of 'hardy souls' attended our Winter Walk that took place on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year. Fortunately, the rain largely held off and trustee Geoff

Carefoot led the guided walk around the Wetlands. Not surprisingly for this time of year, it was the large numbers of waterfowl, particularly on the Island Lake, that caught the eye. Along with an abundance of Mallard and Canada Geese, there were plenty of Teal, Shoveler and Tufted Duck. We watched as a large (over 100) group of Lapwing resting on the larger island were scattered by a fast diving Peregrine hunting for prey. A notable record was the number of Cormorants (8) seen on the Mere, perhaps taking refuge from the dismal weather along the coast.



Watching the Island Lake winter birdlife.

As the walk was concluding, a family of swans flew in together with a group of Greylag Geese and a party of Snipe (20), possibly displaced from the islands by the high water levels (and the hunting Peregrine), overflow the site. Everyone agreed that the walk provided a welcome break from the holiday festivities and we thank all those who attended and look forward to seeing you again.

Winter Work Programme

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, volunteers have completed a number of notable tasks on the Wetlands during the winter months. Perhaps the thing that any recent visitor will have noticed is that we have managed to achieve significantly higher water levels in the Fen than hitherto possible. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, it has, obviously been unremittingly wet this winter;

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however, the impression is that that water has been retained more successfully than in the past. There are two reasons for this. The recent work done by contractors to remove willow, is a significant factor. Willow have a remarkable capacity to remove water from the ground and as willow takes over the base of the Fen it only accelerates the drying of the Fen, as illustrated by what happened during the dry months of last year.

In addition, we have created a small sandbag barrier to try and hold more water in the Fen – rather than immediately running off into the Island Lake. It remains to be seen if sufficient water can be retained in this way to prevent or, more realistically, slow down the drying out of the Fen in the drier spring and summer months.



Volunteers surveying the newly-constructed sandbag barrier in the Fen.

There are many advantages in retaining water in the base of the Fen. Where willow has been cut, maintaining the cut stumps below water should help suppress re-growth and thereby give the reed bed in the south west corner of the Fen the chance to expand with all the advantages that type of habitat offers. The Fen water levels achieved this winter look absolutely ideal for Water Rail, a relative of the Moorhen and Coot frequently seen on the Wetlands. Water Rail certainly already live on the Wetlands (and in the past, during freezing conditions, have been seen feeding on seeds spilled from bird feeders). They are generally extremely secretive; however, with the currently increased

water levels it is well worth spending some time quietly observing the standing water around the Fen reed bed. In addition to Water Rail, these conditions are also ideal for Snipe although their exquisite camouflage makes them extremely difficult to see!

Keeping the Fen wet during the summer months clearly also has advantages for populations of aquatic invertebrates. For example, without at least some wet/damp areas, dragonfly larvae will not survive and breeding populations of dragonflies will not be sustained.



Crassula on the Island Lake (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Another advantage of maintaining water levels in the Fen, and especially the Island Lake, is suppression of the growth of invasive, non-native crassula (see last newsletter). Like just about every other wetland site across the UK, Grimsargh Wetlands is susceptible to *Crassula helmsii*. Indeed, any of you who visit other local nature reserves (e.g. Alston Wetland, or Brockholes) will undoubtedly have noticed the presence of crassula over, often quite extensive, areas (<https://www.brockholes.org/blog/alice-singleton/what-crassula-and-what-problem>). It is a highly adaptable plant, growing just below the water surface and in the margins. The real concern for us is that if it covers exposed mud it can cause problems for feeding wading birds.

There is little that can be done to eliminate this invasive species; at best, it may be possible to

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manage it. In our case, flooding the Island Lake in winter should help suppress the growth and spread of the weed. Given the extensive area already infiltrated by the crassula, mechanical means of control (i.e. digging it out) are unlikely to be successful (and would be prohibitively expensive if contractors were to undertake the work). Of course, the dilemma for us is that lower water levels (and the resultant exposed mud) are attractive to waders and other birds although exposure of mud is also likely to encourage further spread of the crassula which, in time, will make the mud less attractive/accessible to those same birds.



Clearing one of the Fen ponds.

Another key activity has been the work on the Fen viewing screen area. It is notable that the small pond in front of the viewing screen is rather stagnant and effectively devoid of aquatic life. In order to try and alleviate this issue, a number of the trees immediately surrounding the pond have been removed, in an effort to increase the amount of sunlight getting to the water.

In addition, the area beyond the clearing, immediately in front of the viewing screen, is currently inundated with small willow and other stunted trees. Work has been undertaken to carefully open up this area by creating 'corridors' deeper into the Fen. In addition to improving the biodiversity of the Fen, these changes should also improve the viewing opportunities for visitors using the screen.



Newly positioned bat and bird boxes in well established trees around the Orchard.

Finally, in preparation for the up-coming bird nesting season, volunteers installed a range of new nest boxes. The opportunity was also taken to install a number of bat boxes. In addition to a number of boxes made by trustee, Geoff Carefoot, we were extremely lucky to be given a range of bird nest boxes and bat boxes by Grimsargh Parish Council. This donation was made possible by a Biodiversity Grant provided to the Parish Council by Lancashire County Council and we are extremely grateful for their generosity.

New Projects

A number of new projects are 'in progress' on the Wetlands and you may see evidence of these projects if you visit the Wetlands in the coming weeks. As you know, over the past few years, a number of tern rafts have been installed on the Mere. These rafts have produced mixed results (somewhat overshadowed by the on-going outbreak of avian influenza and the resultant uncertainty about tern and gull populations). Although initially used by terns, the rafts have more recently attracted Black-headed Gulls to the detriment of nesting opportunities for terns. A policy of keeping the nesting trays closed until the seasonal arrival of terns may help with this issue.

Quick, as ever, to spot a way to further improve opportunities for terns to nest at Grimsargh Wetlands, trustee Geoff Carefoot noted that a new tern raft had recently been installed at

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Condor Pool, near Glasson Dock. The new raft is much larger than the cable drum rafts that we have and therefore should be more stable to wind and wave action, thereby reducing the risk of young birds being lost in the water. Additionally, there are no nesting trays on the new raft. Instead, the platform of the raft is completely covered in pebbles that the terns are happy to nest in directly. A few ridge tiles on the raft provide some sanctuary for young chicks.

Needless to say, at the time of writing, Geoff is busily constructing a similar raft for the Wetlands and it is hoped that construction and installation of the new raft, on the Mere, will be completed before the arrival of terns in late spring and early summer.

Another project that visitors may see 'in action' in the weeks ahead relates to protection of nesting waders. As long-time readers will know, predation of wader nests and chicks is a significant problem, not just at the Wetlands, but at many other reserves. In the case of the Little Ringed Plover, one partial solution to this problem is to use a 'nesting cage' to protect the nest site. The solution is only partial in that although the cages offer some protection to nests and eggs, from a number of avian and mammalian predators, chicks are not protected once they leave the nest site. The approach has met with some success at a number of reserves.

In the event that nesting Little Ringed Plover are observed in locations suitable for the use of cages, their use will be trialled on the Wetlands. Any such work will be carried out by appropriately licenced individuals and we are particularly grateful to our colleagues at WWT Martin Mere for the loan of cages, their advice and encouragement.

Finally, it is also possible that a small, temporary fence may be erected on the larger island of the Island Lake. This will be done in an effort to discourage mammalian predation of wader nests.



One of the nest cages designed to deter mammalian predation.

Recording Bird Sightings on the Wetlands

In response to the, often asked, question - 'Where can I find out about the birds seen recently on the Wetlands?' - it is worth remembering that the ELOC (East Lancashire Ornithologists' club) website (<https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/>) carries daily updates of verified sightings in the area. Grimsargh (and Grimsargh Wetlands) fall on the very western edge of the ELOC recording area; however, their closeness to Alston Wetland and the fact that there is so much 'avian commute' between Alston and Grimsargh means that local records are maintained by ELOC (rather than by, for example, the Fylde Bird Club).

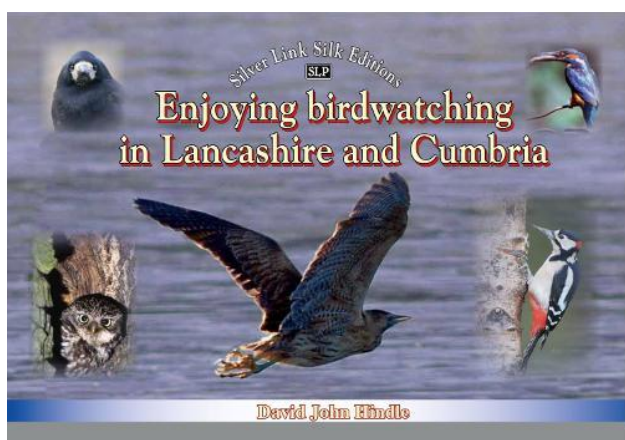
The ELOC *Recent Sightings* webpage shows daily updates of observations. The website has recently been upgraded so that clicking on any recording site named on the *Recent Sightings* page links to a page showing the recent history of records from that location. This feature is obviously useful for noting any seasonal or other trends in observations.

Trustees, Geoff Carefoot and David Hindle regularly submit their records from the Wetlands, and elsewhere, to the ELOC site; however, anyone who is a registered user of the ELOC website can submit sightings. Anyone, registered or not, can view accepted sightings. The importance of submitting sightings in this way is not just so that we know what has been going on locally. It is important because data,

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recorded in this way, ultimately becomes incorporated into local (e.g. the Lancashire Bird Report) and national publications and databases. It is only by the long-term analysis of these national databases that changes in bird populations can be properly monitored. Sadly, as mentioned previously in these newsletters, the UK's bird population is in persistent decline, largely as a result of habitat loss, and monitoring this decline continues to be of paramount importance.

New Publication



In addition to his role as Chair of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust, David Hindle is author of a number of books on local history and birdlife. His latest book 'Enjoying Birdwatching in Lancashire and Cumbria' (ISBN 978-1-85794-605-5, Silver Link Books, Mortons Media Group Ltd.) reflects his life-long passion for birdwatching in the North-West. Of particular interest to us is the inclusion of a section on Grimsargh Wetlands, alongside such noted local nature reserves as RSPB Leighton Moss and WWT Martin Mere. The book (192 pages) is lavishly illustrated with a stunning selection of full colour images, many of which are attributed to fellow trustee, Geoff Carefoot – whose passion for bird photography is clear for all to see in this book.

The book is organised into a number of geographically distinct sections that highlight sites ranging from local city parks, coastal reserves, the Bowland Fells and, of course, the

lakes and fells of the Lake District. Each site is identified by a grid reference along with an indication of how easy the site is to access/walk. Detailed directions are provided as is an in-depth summary of the seasonal bird-life that the visitor may expect to see.

The book is available now in bookshops (including the book sections of local reserve shops) and from online suppliers. The cover price is £30 and royalties from sales of the book will be donated to wildlife charities including Grimsargh Wetlands Trust.

Recent Donations



Secretary to the Trust, Jayne Woollam accepts a cheque from supporter Neil Hartley.

At one of our recent volunteer sessions, we were delighted to be presented with an extremely generous donation from members of Longridge Masonic Lodge (longridgelodge.co.uk) as part of their on-going programme of support for charities in the local community. Local resident, and long-time supporter of the Wetlands, Neil Hartley presented the Trust with a cheque for £250. The funds will be used to support the maintenance work done by our volunteers and we are tremendously grateful to the members of the Lodge for their generosity.

Of course, it is not just financial donations that help support the work on the Wetlands. This is illustrated by the recent donation, from a member of the local community, of a number of wooden pallets.



Trustee John Willan collects donated pallets (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

Leanne Mulley, heard about our need for some pallets when she attended our recent Winter Walk. She offered a number of pallets that will be used (along with pallets donated by former trustee, Phil Atkinson) for the construction of a crossing point over the notoriously slippery spillway from the sluice on the Island Lake. Pallets will also be used for the creation of a stable working platform for assembly and maintenance of tern rafts on the embankment of the Mere.

We are grateful to all who donate to the upkeep of the Wetlands. No gift is too small, it is remarkable how the ‘coppers’ donated to our collection box, in the Grimsargh Premier Store, quickly add up to a very significant amount. We are extremely grateful to Jaz for allowing us to keep a collection box in the store. We would be delighted to hear (email grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com) from any other local businesses able to ‘host’ one of our collection boxes.

New Trustee

We are delighted to announce that Phil, one of our long-time volunteers has been co-opted as a trustee with immediate effect. Phil is a recently retired Environmental Health Officer, specialising in environmental protection. He has volunteered on the Wetlands for several years

and has a lifelong interest in the natural world, in particular invertebrates and plants.



Phil at work on the Fen.

Secretary to the Trust, Jayne Woollam commented: *‘Phil has all the qualities of a good trustee – he shows commitment, has a generous spirit, works well in a team and is interested in the future of the Wetlands and we are delighted to welcome him to our team’.*

Spring Volunteer Days and Guided Walk



Volunteers at a recent work party on the Fen.

Our winter volunteer days have been tremendously successful, with old and new faces regularly turning out to work in, sometimes, less than ideal weather. Our spring volunteer dates, for March and April 2024, are listed here:

Sunday 3rd March
Saturday 16th March
Sunday 7th April
Saturday 20th April

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Work sessions start at 10 am, when we meet at the Compound. Generally, we work until about 2 pm; 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 (www.grimsarghwetlands.org). If you register as a volunteer, 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.

GRIMSARGH WETLANDS

GUIDED SPRING WALK



**SATURDAY 30TH
MARCH**

Book at grimsarghwetlands.org

We plan to hold a 'Guided Spring Walk' at 10 am on Saturday 30th March (meet at the Compound, opposite Oban Court). If you wish to attend the guided walk, please use the online booking system on our website to book your place and receive the latest information regarding the arrangements for the day.

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 early wild-flowers that the Wetlands is renowned for. Of course, timing is everything, so fingers crossed, we will be able to see plenty of orchids. 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.

A Reminder – Visiting the Wetlands

If you intend to visit the Wetlands on your own, we have an access point ('what3words' location - *newsstand.lunch.bucked*), from Preston Road, just across from Oban Court, leading to the Compound viewing screens. We also have an access point to the public footpath, that bisects the Wetlands, via the ginnel from Preston Road, just opposite Elston Lane (what3words - *organist.stirs.bonfires*). Finally, there is an access point from Preston Road, just by the new pedestrian crossing point opposite the Elston Park Development (what3words - *doted.budding.gravitate*). This access point leads to the Fen viewing screen.

We do ask that visitors only use these designated public access points. The public footpath across the Wetlands is very popular with dog-walkers and we ask that dogs are kept on leads at all times. In addition to protecting the Wetlands wildlife, this measure is particularly important in the context of the ongoing national avian influenza outbreak.

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). Any general queries about the work of the Trust should be sent to grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com.

Acknowledgements

We thank Jayne Woollam and Geoff Carefoot 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 our website. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1174037.

LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND