

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Spring 2026



Welcome

Welcome to your Spring Newsletter. After a prolonged spell of dreary winter weather it is good to, at last, see the first signs that spring is on the way. Already the first spring flowers are beginning to show on our embankments and the curlew are making their very welcome presence known.

We are delighted to report that the Lancashire Environmental Fund has, once again, provided us with a grant in support of our latest project and you can read all about that work, which has already started, in this newsletter.

If you are visiting the Wetlands in the coming days, please be aware that the Environmental Agency are, at the time of writing, undertaking some remedial work on the Grimsargh Culvert in an area adjacent to the Wetlands, and elsewhere. As a consequence, they have established a work base in our compound area (our access point, opposite Oban Court). They only require access to the culvert via our embankments over a few days; however, they will maintain their base on the Wetlands until work on the culvert elsewhere in Grimsargh has been completed.

The presence of the EA on site should not affect access to the public footpath or our viewing screens; however, you should be aware that if you wish to access the main viewing screens you will effectively be walking through a work area containing vehicles and heavy machinery. You should therefore approach with the necessary caution. Thank you.

The Trustees

Avian Influenza Update



Sadly, but perhaps not unexpectedly, the number of wild bird cases of avian influenza have, over the winter months, continued to increase across the country. Most cases have been in resident water fowl although, since November, the number of cases in over-wintering Whooper Swans has increased markedly. As a consequence, the wild bird risk level across the country is still classed as VERY HIGH.



Confirmed cases of avian influenza in wild birds during the winter months (taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-bird-flu-in-europe>).

Spring 2026

From the map, shown here, it is clear that there has been an abundance of cases recorded around our region. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the importance of the Ribble and Lune estuaries as feeding grounds for over-wintering water fowl.

It is important to remember that maps like this only show confirmed cases i.e. cases of dead wild birds reported by the public, then collected for analysis and confirmed as infected following that analysis. You will therefore appreciate that such reports only represent the 'tip of the iceberg' and there are sure to be many additional mortalities, on the estuarine salt marshes and elsewhere, that never get recorded.

On a more positive note, the number of migratory birds over-wintering in the U.K. is now at its peak and many will soon be returning to Europe where cases now appear to be falling. It is anticipated that cases in the U.K. will also decrease onwards from March as migratory birds depart and resident birds disperse from their winter feeding grounds to their summer breeding sites.



Wintering cranes on the Camargue rice paddies (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Although cases in Europe do appear to be falling, it is worth highlighting the plight of the Common Crane. Cranes continue to be very badly affected by the virus all along their migration route through Germany, France and now Spain. The impact of the virus on mainland Europe crane populations has been described as utterly devastating with many thousands of

birds succumbing to infection. Their susceptibility has, perhaps not surprisingly, been attributed to their gregarious behaviour at feeding and resting sites. Of course, cranes are uncommon in the U.K. with the few that are seen being resident rather than over-wintering birds.

Notwithstanding the hope that the spring months will bring a decrease in the number of avian influenza cases across the country, it is important that we all remain vigilant. This is the case irrespective of whether we are taking a walk in the countryside or simply feeding the garden birds. Always avoid contact with dead wild birds, feathers or faecal material. Keep bird feeders clean and always thoroughly wash hands after handling bird-feeders. The risk to humans is low as long as these simple, sensible precautions are followed.

Winter Guided Walk

We held our traditional winter guided walk on a bright, but cold and frosty, Saturday morning during the Christmas and New Year break. As always, this provided an opportunity for members of the public to indulge in some gentle exercise, between bouts of 'festive over-indulgence'. In addition, it provided some great nature-watching opportunities.



Visitors watching birdlife on the Island Lake.

As always, there was plenty of birdlife to be seen. Not surprisingly, there was a large winter population of Mallard along with a pleasing number of Teal (around 65 on the Island Lake).

Spring 2026

More surprising was the presence of a pair of Shelduck (more often seen on the coast at this time of year). There was only a single Coot seen (along with a pair of Moorhen). This is in stark contrast to the situation only a few years ago when 30 or more Coot were regularly recorded on the Mere and Island Lake at this time of year. The, often seen, Heron was fishing in the shallows of the Island Lake while Cormorants were 'chilling out' on the rafts on the Mere. High overhead, a Buzzard was seen circling. Finally, a very welcome sight was a relatively substantial flock (around 50) of Fieldfare. These winter thrushes (along with Redwing) have been locally scarce this winter, although numbers have been more impressive elsewhere in Lancashire.



Jelly fungi on the Wetlands.

One downside of the cold and frosty weather was that many of the fungi that had been flourishing in the milder, damp weather in the lead-up to Christmas had succumbed to the frosty conditions. Nonetheless, there were still plenty of different jelly fungi to be seen – even if they were no longer at their best.

We are delighted that people chose to spend a few hours engaging with nature on the Wetlands. Finally, we are grateful to those who, at the end of the walk, made donations in support of our work on the Wetlands.

Funding Success

As mentioned in the introduction, we have been extremely fortunate to have been awarded a

grant of £3000 by the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF). As described in previous newsletters, this fund is closing and is currently in the process of awarding its last ever grants. It is one of these grants that we are fortunate enough to have been awarded. As you will know, we have received generous funding from the LEF right from the early days of the Wetlands. All the access points, footpaths and viewing screens that you find on the Wetlands today were only possible with the support of the LEF and we thank them for their generosity.



Work has started on the new quiet area.

The new grant is in support of our latest project which involves the creation of a small 'quiet space' adjacent to the public footpath and opposite the public footpath viewing screen. The new space will have, as its centrepiece, a tree dedicated to the memory of our late friend and colleague, Jayne Woollam. There will be a bench where visitors can relax and spend a few moments in quiet contemplation while engaging with nature.

If you visit the Wetlands you will see that work on the area has already started with the erection of a new fence and gate. Tree planting and placement of a bench will take place in the coming weeks.

We hope visitors will enjoy and respect this new space on the Wetlands and, once again, we thank the LEF for their generous support over the years. We are particularly grateful for the support and encouragement we always received from the late Andy Rowett who, as LEF Fund Manager, championed the cause of the Wetlands

Spring 2026

for many years. More recently, we are indebted to Elizabeth Morgan for her encouragement and help.

Winter Volunteer Day Work



Winter raft maintenance on the Mere.

We held regular weekend volunteer sessions over the winter months. We were lucky to only lose one session as a consequence of poor weather (torrential rain finally forcing us off the embankments!). Throughout the winter, we have had a small but extremely loyal group of volunteers who regularly turned out to spend a few hours on the Wetlands. We greatly appreciate their continued hard work and enthusiasm. It is no exaggeration to say that we would be lost without them. Unfortunately, our numbers remain small, and it would make so much difference if even just a few more people were able to attend and spend a few hours working with nature.



First embankment top cut of the year.

Going forward, there will be opportunities for further volunteer work. Obviously, we need to be mindful of the bird nesting season. Nonetheless, there is plenty of work that needs to be done throughout the spring and summer months when the scrub and brambles grow at 'breakneck' speed!

Curlew and Whimbrel Roosts



Curlew resting on the Wetlands (along with a lone Oystercatcher).

As you will know, Curlew typically spend the winter on our coasts and estuaries where they feed on tidal mudflats, salt marshes and surrounding farmland. During the spring, they move inland to summer breeding grounds (locally, the Bowland Fells). It is this spring migration, between the coast and the fells, that makes Grimsargh Wetlands an ideal place for birds to rest and roost as they move inland.

At the time of writing (mid February), numbers of Curlew roosting on the Wetlands are rapidly increasing (over 400 recorded roosting on 14th February). The roost is likely to reach its peak in early March. These numbers will soon fall as the flights inland decline.

Clearly, now is the time to see, and hear, large numbers of this enigmatic and terribly endangered wader. Without doubt, the best opportunities for witnessing large numbers of Curlew on the Island Lake are at dusk. Visiting during the middle of the day is likely to result in seeing only a handful of birds with the majority of birds feeding in local fields and elsewhere.

Spring 2026

Just as numbers of Curlew roosting on the Wetlands diminish, the numbers of the, rather similar looking, Whimbrel will begin to increase. We are fortunate that the Wetlands is now one of the key 'stop-over' sites, in Lancashire, for late-spring migrating Whimbrel. The latter weeks of April are the key times to observe Whimbrel roosting on the Wetlands. Again, dusk is, without doubt, the best time to see large numbers.

Rare Geese in Lancashire

As already described, local estuaries are internationally important over-wintering sites for a wide variety of migratory waterfowl. For example, we are all familiar with the vast numbers of Pink-footed Goose that spend the winter months on the salt marshes of the Sefton and Fylde Coasts. However, this winter an unusual, if not unprecedented, event has occurred with a normally rare species of goose appearing locally in unheard of numbers. Trustee, and expert ornithologist, Geoff Carefoot takes up the story.

"England had an unprecedented influx of Russian White-fronted Geese at the beginning of February, some of them appearing locally.

The White-fronted Goose is a small 'grey' goose with a diagnostic white 'blaze' above the bill, black belly bands and orange legs, young birds are not as distinct.

The Eurasian population of White-fronted Goose breeds on the Arctic tundra and in the northern 'Taiga' forests of Siberia and is referred to as the Russian White-fronted Goose. A neararctic population breeds in Canada as far east as Western Greenland and occasionally occurs in Britain.

Historically, the numbers of 'White fronts' visiting Britain have declined as climate change and warmer winters have resulted in 'short-stopping' where the birds find suitable winter feeding on their westward winter migration without travelling the full distance.



Russian White-fronted Geese in the fields around Alston Reservoirs and Wetland (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Numbers began to increase slightly in January and most groups were small family parties, e.g., an adult pair with four adult offspring or 'first-winters'. However, early February featured substantial flocks being observed as far west as, for example, Pilling Moss where over 500 were encountered.

Whereas 'White fronts' were more often encountered in eastern England, the western spread was unprecedented and the above total is the most ever seen in Lancashire.

It appears that the flocks short-stopping in the Netherlands had been affected by a severe cold spell on the continent and a run of strong easterly winds which encouraged them to forage further west.

Locally, six birds were at Alston Wetland on Pinfold Lane as an isolated group but also later amongst the larger Canada Geese and Greylag Geese which makes it imperative to scan through flocks of our local semi-resident 'tame' geese to see if they hold any of these Russian visitors."

News from the Trust

New Trustee

We have, for some time, been looking to recruit additional trustees and we are delighted to announce that one of our regular volunteers, Dominic Best has now been appointed as a

Spring 2026

trustee. Dominic, has provided the following outline of his background and interests:

“I live in Blackpool and work as a civil servant. I studied palaeontology and ecology at university, completing a Master’s degree in Palaeontology with Geology. I also volunteer weekly with Liverpool World Museum, where I work on their arachnid collections. In the past, I spent a year volunteering with the Fylde Ranger Service.



Dominic at work on the Wetlands.

Outside of work, especially over the summer, I spend a lot of time surveying spiders and insects, which is where my main interest lies. Volunteering at Grimsargh Wetlands helped spark my interest in birdwatching, and I now regularly record what I’ve seen.

I have experience of tender writing, as well as software and web development, a skill set I’m hoping will be useful behind the scenes as a trustee.”

We are particularly pleased that Dominic’s expert knowledge of spider and insect identification, dramatically improves the knowledge-base of the Trust. On *iNaturalist* (<https://www.inaturalist.org>), Dominic has a list of over 700 identified species that includes well over 100 spiders along with over 100 beetles together with numerous flies, true bugs, ants, wasps, bees, butterflies and moths. As you can imagine, Dominic’s entomological knowledge will prove invaluable in furthering our understanding of the biodiversity of the

Wetlands (as already demonstrated by his key role in last summer’s ‘Bug Hunt’).

We do currently have a vacancy for a further trustee and if you would like to find out more about what is involved in being a trustee, do let us know of your interest (email: grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).

Of course, aside from the trustee vacancies we are always looking for new volunteers. In this context, it’s not just about a willingness to come along to work sessions on the Wetlands. If you feel you have skills to offer the Trust do please let us know. For example, we are delighted to have Louise Lunt who regularly bakes cakes and other savoury treats for our volunteers at our work sessions. We also now have Pauline Shepard, who volunteers secretarial support for our monthly trustee meetings and we are tremendously grateful for her efforts. We have other volunteers who are happy to support us at events like the Field Day – helping on the stall, walking in the parade shaking collection tubs etc.

So, if you have a skill or interest that you feel may usefully support the Trust, do please let us know. Finally, if you can spend a few hours at the weekends, then do think about coming along to one of our work sessions.

New Year’s Honours

Many of you will undoubtedly be aware that Trust Chair, David Hindle was recently awarded an MBE in the King’s New Year Honours announcements. This richly deserved award was made for ‘*services to the community in Grimsargh*’. This award reflects David’s, long-standing contribution to the community, be it as local historian, naturalist, Parish Councillor or author of numerous books of local interest.

Of course, it was David’s role, along with others, in the successful ‘re-birth’ of the decommissioned Grimsargh Reservoirs as Grimsargh Wetlands that is of particular interest to us.



David (right), alongside trustees John Willan and Geoff Carefoot, at one of our volunteer sessions.

As you may know, the reservoirs that, historically, had supplied drinking water for Preston and supported the needs of local industry (including the long since demolished Courtaulds Red Scar factory) were decommissioned by the early 1980s.

Over subsequent years, David played a key role in the transformation of the site into a nature reserve and in 2003 the site was designated a 'Biological Heritage Site'. Nonetheless, much work, by David and others, was necessary to prevent the site being given over to housing developments. In this context, then County Councillor, Ron Woollam also played a key role in enlisting the support of Ribble Valley MP, Nigel Evans, in efforts to save the reservoirs from development in the 2000s. It was in 2017 that the site was finally gifted, by United Utilities, to the community of Grimsargh and the Trust, with David as Chair, was founded.

Fund Raising Update

We had a stall at the Grimsargh Farmers' Market in the months leading up to Christmas. We are delighted that, overall, nearly £700 was raised from sales of our calendars and greetings cards together with bird feeders and nest boxes

donated by Animal Crackers. The sum also includes donations from collection tubs and sales of calendars and cards at the Premier Store, Grimsargh, Alderbank Physiotherapy & Sports Injury Clinic, Grimsargh and Blue Moon Computers, Longridge.



Trustee Lezley Walker at our stall in Blue Moon Computers on the 'Longridge Does Christmas' Evening (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

We are particularly grateful to Blue Moon Computers who, in addition to selling our calendars and cards before Christmas, allowed us run our stall in their shop on the evening of the 'Longridge Does Christmas' event.

We thank all the people who purchased items, or made donations, at our stall or in the shops. Remember, all the proceeds of our fund-raising efforts go directly into supporting the work of the Trust. We are indebted to Lindsay at Animal Crackers and the staff at Blue Moon Computers for their on-going and extremely generous support. We are also grateful to trustee, Lezley Walker who gave up her Saturday mornings in order to run the Farmers' Market stall for us.

Spring Walk

We plan to hold a 'Spring Guided Walk' in April (date to be confirmed) and we have our fingers crossed for good weather and plenty of spring flowers in bloom. You may recall that, last year, we had an unprecedented display of orchids all along the south-facing embankment

Spring 2026

of the Mere along with, for the first time, flowers in and around the compound access point.



Last year's display of Early Purple Orchids was the best in years.

If you wish to attend the guided walk, please use the online booking form that will be available on our website once the date of the walk is confirmed.

Volunteer Days

Our volunteer work schedule for the early weeks of spring is:

Sunday 1st March
Saturday 14th March
Sunday 29th March
Saturday 18th April

Work sessions start at 10 am, when we meet in the Compound. Generally, we work until about 2 pm in the afternoon; however, people are obviously free to leave as and when they wish. We ask everyone to book onto the volunteer days using our online booking system. 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.

Corporate Volunteer Days

If your company is looking for an opportunity to volunteer locally as part of your 'Corporate Responsibility Commitments' strategy, why not

consider coming to Grimsargh Wetlands for the day?

CHOOSE GRIMSARGH WETLANDS FOR YOUR CORPORATE AWAY DAY



 grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com

We welcome groups of volunteers from organisations and businesses who want to make a difference in the communities in which they work. There is always maintenance work to be done. If you would like to enquire about organising an 'Away Day' for your team, then please contact us at grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com for further information.

Legacy Planning, Gifts and Donations

Many people choose to leave a gift, to a charity of their choice, in their Will. A legacy to Grimsargh Wetlands Trust will provide a lasting gift, helping to safeguard the future of Grimsargh Wetlands and ensuring that generations to come will continue to enjoy our wonderful nature reserve. We have many ambitious and exciting ideas for future projects and legacy income can provide us with the funds to develop these projects. Please consider leaving something to Grimsargh Wetlands Trust when you write, or update, your Will.

Celebrating and commemorating the life of a loved one, with a gift in their memory, is also a fitting tribute that helps support our work for Grimsargh Wetlands. Remember, it is now possible to make a donation to Grimsargh

Spring 2026

Wetlands Trust, via PayPal, by scanning the following QR code with your phone:



We're always grateful to receive donations large or small.

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 main 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 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. Please remember there is no on-site parking.

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 us by email at grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com. Remember, it is now possible to pay your subscriptions using *Paypal*.

Acknowledgements

We thank Geoff Carefoot for allowing the use of his photographs. We are grateful to the

Lancashire Environmental Fund and the Harold and Alice Bridges Trust for their generous financial support. A full list of our local sponsors can be found on our website. Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1174037.

LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

