

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Spring 2020



Welcome

Dear All,

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter! The relatively mild (but very wet!) Winter means that Spring has come early to the Wetlands with primroses and other flowers already in bloom. You will have the chance to see the fabulous displays, and other Wetlands wildlife, at our Spring Flower Walk on 29th March and we look forward to seeing you then.

The Spring Flower Walk will also give you the opportunity to use our new viewing screens. The contractors have finished their work and it only remains for volunteers to add some finishing touches; however, the new viewing area is now open to the public. We hope you enjoy reading all about the recent work and we look forward to seeing you out and about on the Wetlands in the Spring sunshine!

With best wishes,

The Trustees

News

New Viewing Screens

The wet weather over the winter led to some very challenging conditions for the contractors working on site. Nonetheless, the contractors successfully completed their work in early February. The access ramp and viewing area have been surfaced and new fencing and gates have been erected to provide secure pedestrian access through the Compound to the new viewing area.



Access ramp to the viewing screens (photograph by Lesley Walker).

Extensive work has been done on the area in front of the viewing screens to ensure unimpeded views from the screens. Mark Ashmore's wonderful aerial image (see below) gives an excellent view of the new viewing area and the extensive remodelling of the Compound that has been completed over the Winter months.



Aerial view of the new viewing area (photograph by Mark Ashmore).

A number of jobs remain to be completed. An extensive wild-flower re-seeding programme of the area is in progress. Planting of shrubs and saplings to provide sympathetic screening of the

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area leading to, and behind, the viewing screens will be undertaken.



Volunteers re-seeding around the ramp area in preparation for the opening of the new screens to the public (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Finally, appropriate signage is being prepared for the area. Notwithstanding these minor items of work, the new screens are now open to the public. As indicated elsewhere in the Newsletter, it will be possible for visitors to see the new facilities at one of our up-coming guided walks. There will be an official opening event (date to be confirmed) in the summer.

Review of Bird Sightings in 2019

Observations of Wetlands birdlife are most appropriately recorded on the ELOC website (East Lancashire Ornithologists' Club (<https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/index.aspx>)). It is always worth keeping an eye on the ELOC website as birds reported at other local sites often show up on the Wetlands. There is no doubt that many birds regularly 'commute' between Grimsargh Wetlands and Alston (the Alston reservoirs and Alston Wetland, Pinfold Lane). Such records only provide a 'snapshot' of the birdlife on the Wetlands; however, some of the reported highlights for 2019 are listed below.

1. Over seventy different species of bird were recorded during 2019, ranging from the tiny Wren (Britain's most abundant breeding bird) to

the Grey Heron (there was no return of the Great White Egret that visited the Wetlands in October 2018 although there were occasional reports of Little Egret flying over the Wetlands during the last year).



Single Barnacle Goose (background) with Greylag Goose (foreground) (photograph by Richard Moss).

2. Large numbers of geese were, again, routinely counted on, and around the Wetlands, with a maximum of 97 Greylag Goose reported in February and 118 Canada Goose reported in May. Disappointingly, there were no reports of any Pink-footed Goose among the groups of geese resident in the surrounding fields; however, a single Barnacle Goose was occasionally seen and photographed.

3. The highest count of roosting Lapwing was a very impressive 310 in July (compared with 213 in 2018). In contrast, the numbers of other wading species were disappointing. Pairs of Bar-tailed Godwit and Avocet were briefly seen in April and a slightly larger (11) group of Black-tailed Godwit was recorded in May. Oystercatchers were rather more prevalent (a maximum of 20 recorded in June). Once again, predation remains a significant problem with little evidence of successful breeding, on site, by any waders during the year.

4. On a more positive note, the numbers of Curlew and Whimbrel roosting on the Wetlands remain impressive. The highest count of roosting Curlew was 150 in March and the largest recorded roosting group of Whimbrel was 29 in April.

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5. The population of ducks on the Wetlands continues to flourish with 180 Mallard, 26 Shoveler and very impressive counts of 40 Tufted Duck and 34 Gadwall recorded at various times during 2019.



Female Goosander (photograph by Richard Moss).

6. A group of 6 Little Grebe was recorded in September – an impressive count for this diminutive diving bird. In addition, during late 2019, a group of Goosander took up residence on the Wetlands. Although the highest recorded count on ELOC was 10 in November, Warden Ken Maylor has recorded up to 26 on some of his daily visits to the Wetlands. These gregarious diving ducks are a member of the sawbill family, reflecting their long, serrated bills, used for catching fish. Their continued presence on the Wetlands does point to a healthy local fish population.

7. Finally, of the summer visitors (Swallow, Swift, Sand Martin and House Martin), the highlight was the count of 27 House Martin recorded in July.

These records, once again, confirm that the Spring and early Summer really are key times for the Wetlands, giving the best opportunities for visitors to observe large numbers of, for example, Lapwing, Curlew and Whimbrel. We would encourage you all to record your observations of birdlife on the ELOC website or, alternatively, on the Wetlands Facebook page. The more records we have the better we can gauge the impact of the work being undertaken on the long-term populations of

birds on the site. Also, and perhaps more importantly, a comprehensive record of the birds (and other wildlife) on the Wetlands is an invaluable indicator of the importance of the site for local wildlife and, therefore, a key element in ensuring the future and security of the Wetlands.

Review of the Winter Volunteer Work

It is worthwhile taking time to review the incredible work that has been successfully completed by our volunteers this winter. After what proved to be a very warm, but wet, summer we were faced with an abundance of lush vegetation on site. The invasive willow had, once again, overwhelmed many of the areas previously cleared and some areas of the site were in danger of becoming completely inaccessible. In order to deal with this, an intensive Winter Work Party programme was undertaken. Some of the results of this effort are summarised below.

1. Thousands of invasive willow ‘whips’ were removed from the Fen area. This effort was aided by the use of ‘tree poppers’ (loaned from our colleagues at the Fylde Council Coast and Conservation Team) and the tireless work of our Warden, Ken Maylor, with the brush cutter.



Volunteers at work digging the first wildlife pond on the Fen (photograph by Lesley Walker).

2. Removal of the willow from the Fen has already allowed the creation of the first, in a series, of wildlife ponds that we hope will rapidly become home to numerous amphibians, a diverse range of aquatic invertebrates and, in

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the summer, populations of dragonflies and damselflies. Furthermore, removal of the willow will encourage the expansion of the existing *Phragmites* reed-bed in the south-west corner of the Fen area. The reed-bed is a particularly important habitat for a number of birds including warblers and buntings.

3. Re-growth of willow and ash, following trimming by contractors last year, was an obvious problem – particularly around the central reservoir. This winter, volunteers and contractors combined their efforts to trim regrowth and remove, or treat, stumps to prevent re-growth. Some of the early benefits of preventing re-growth of invasive willow are already being seen with a variety of ferns flourishing in areas that have been treated in this way. One unexpected thing this work revealed was that there is a considerable ‘market’ for cut willow for wreath-making and other uses. As a consequence, we will ‘set aside’ some areas of willow so that they can be harvested on a regular basis. This means that willow bundles will continue to be available on an annual basis.



The removal of willow and ash regrowth from around the central reservoir is clearly seen here (photograph by Mark Ashmore).

4. Finally, it is worth emphasising that not all trees are being removed! Another aspect of our winter work party programme was the installation of bird and bat boxes around the site. Volunteers will be regularly monitoring these boxes over the coming months.

None of the achievements listed above would have been possible without the efforts of our

dedicated volunteers and we thank them all for their hard work and enthusiasm – often in atrocious weather conditions!



Newly installed nest boxes in the Compound (photograph by Lesley Walker).

Family Winter Walk



Families enjoying the winter sun on the Wetlands.

On Sunday 29th December, we held an ‘After Christmas’ Family Winter Walk. Over 30 people met at Grimsargh Club and set off to walk the Wetlands. This gave everyone a chance to clear away the post-Christmas cobwebs and burn off some of those Christmas calories! People were able to use the new viewing screens to watch the abundant winter waterfowl. Trustees and Ken Maylor, the Wetlands Warden, were on hand to help with bird identification and also talk about progress with the work being done to improve access via the Compound.

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Highlights of the walk included a hunting Kestrel and those with sharp eyes were lucky enough to see a female Sparrowhawk moving quickly along the hedgerows. Eight different species of duck were seen, including a small group of Pochard resplendent in their winter plumage. The children were delighted to find, and follow, deer tracks - although the deer themselves proved elusive. Trustee Andy Small won the award for being the most observant participant when he spotted small Candle Snuff fungi (which, with a white tip and black base, is reminiscent of a snuffed candle wick) – before it was trampled on! Even though the walk took place in the last week of December, the relatively frost-free weather meant that there were already signs of the first primroses emerging.

After the walk, everyone returned to Grimsargh Club and enjoyed the Jacobs Join food that had been brought along for the event. Once people had eaten, a very competitive quiz led to the narrowest of wins (after a re-count!) for the 'Camera Club' team led by Sophie Locker. Finally, Quiz-Master Andy Small announced the results of the Raffle and winners left with a supply of food and drink ideal for the upcoming New Year's Eve celebrations.

Our thanks go to all who participated, the Trustees and volunteers who led the walk, all who donated items for the raffle and quiz and, of course, Dan at Grimsargh Club for hosting the event. Overall, we raised £30, from the raffle, for the purchase of native wild flower seed for the Wetlands.

Guided Walks

The first of what we hope will become regular guided walks around the Wetlands took place on Saturday 18th January. Trustees David Hindle, Phil Atkinson, Mike Fisher and Andy Small led groups around the Wetlands. Over 30 people enjoyed a very informative and entertaining morning, learning about the flora and fauna of this site. For most people the highlight of the day was seeing the first of this year's primroses

and orchids which, with the relatively mild weather, were appearing some 3- 4 weeks early.



Emerging orchids seen on the first guided walk of the year (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

The schedule for future guided walks is shown at the end of this newsletter. The format is simple. No booking or fee is required, if you want to take part, simply turn up on the day! Groups will be led around the site by Trustees, volunteers or the Warden. The route will depend upon conditions and the time of year and, as always, you should bring appropriate footwear and clothing.



Trustee Andy Small leads a group of visitors around the Wetlands on the first guided walk of the year.

Alston Lane Primary School

A team of Wetlands volunteers and Trustees recently answered a plea for help with the

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restoration of the Eco-garden at Alston Lane Primary School. As the image below shows, the garden had, over recent years, been neglected and was seriously over-grown.



Alston Lane Primary School Eco-garden before restoration (photograph by Andy Small).

The team, along with help from Head Teacher, Mr FitzGibbon, parents and children were, over two days, able to transform the site before the School reopened after the Christmas vacation. The restored site will provide an excellent environment for children to learn about nature and Site Supervisor (and Wetlands Trustee) Andy Small, will be helping the staff and children maintain and develop the garden. The School was so delighted with the work that they made an extremely generous donation to the Trust, for which we are extremely grateful.



The Eco-garden after restoration by the Wetlands team (photograph by Andy Small).

As a follow-up, Trustees returned to the School on Monday 27th January to help the staff and children undertake their 'RSPB Big Bird Count'. Children from the Reception Class and Year 3 had an amazing time recording birds (and other wildlife) around the School, including the newly restored Eco-garden, and surrounding fields. Over 20 different species of bird were recorded ranging from the opportunist Pied Wagtails and House Sparrows making the most of crumbs from the children's play-time toast snacks to the magnificent mixed flock of over 300 Fieldfare, Redwing and Starling in the fields behind the School. However, for the Reception Class children, the highlight of the day was undoubtedly the *impromptu* 'worm-charming' event that they took part in. This rapidly led to the appearance of numerous worms in the play areas that were soon noticed by an inquisitive Robin and hungry Blackbirds!

RSPB Visit the Wetlands

The RSPB recently appointed Hilary McGuire as their Conservation Advisor for the Forest of Bowland. As such, Hilary's priorities are to coordinate the annual wader survey in Bowland and to provide conservation and agri-environment advice and support to local farmers and land owners. It was a pleasure to welcome Hilary on her recent, first visit to the Wetlands.



RSPB Conservation Officer Hilary McGuire (second from right) with Trustees, Warden, Ken Maylor and Luca (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

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Warden, Ken Maylor was able to provide Hilary with a detailed history and tour of our site. In particular, Ken stressed the importance of the site for waders such as Lapwing, Curlew and Whimbrel. Subsequently, Hilary met with volunteers and Trustees and was clearly impressed with all the work being undertaken. She was particularly supportive of the plans for further habitat improvement on the site. Although Hilary has previously worked on the RSPB Twite Recovery Project, and as an RSPB Nest Protection Officer she is, as a Canadian with a family home and farm in Alberta, still learning about UK birdlife and eagerly looks forward to further visits to the Wetlands.

Assistant Warden appointed



Assistant Warden Neil Hartley (photograph by Ken Maylor).

The Trust is delighted to announce that long-time Grimsargh resident, avid supporter and Life Member of the Trust, Neil Hartley, has been appointed as Assistant Warden. Neil, a retired prison officer, will be supporting Warden, Ken Maylor in his duties around the Wetlands with immediate effect. Neil has a long association with the Wetlands, like Ken, he was a member of the Red Scar Angling Association and fished the reservoirs until the closure of the fishery. He remains a keen fly fisherman and is

passionate about the wildlife of the Wetlands and elsewhere. Many of you will already be acquainted with Neil and if you see him when visiting the site, do say hello!

Calendar

As mentioned in our last newsletter, our first Wetlands calendar proved to be tremendously popular. It is worthwhile putting some numbers to this success. The calendar was a sell-out – all 250 copies were sold before the end of the year. Sponsorship fees raised over £520 and calendar sales, and associated donations, raised over £1900. Taking into account production, and other costs (e.g. stall fees, envelopes etc.), the project generated over £1800 for the Wetlands. This makes the calendar, by far, the most significant fund-raising activity of the year and this is something we are keen to repeat. Obviously, in order to do this, we need your images of the Wetlands, and it's wildlife, and we encourage everyone to continue to post their images on our Facebook page. This year we will be looking at different formats for the calendar and also at the possibility of producing a range of Wetlands greetings/Christmas cards.

On a technical note. Whatever the size and resolution of images on Facebook, we would always want to use images of the highest possible resolution for inclusion in the calendar. By way of example, an image of at least 300 pixels per inch (ppi) makes for good print quality. So, to print an A4 sized image (8.27 x 11.69 inches) requires a file that has at least 8.27 x 300 (2481) pixels along its short side and 11.69 x 300 (3507) pixels along its long side. A 'True Colour' uncompressed, image file of 2481 x 3507 pixels is likely to have a size of approx. 25 Mb.

Other fund-raising activities

Although it already seems a long time ago, it would be remiss not to highlight the various fund-raising activities that took place during the lead-up to Christmas.

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Firstly, a great big thank you to all staff, customers and friends at Blue Moon Computers, Berry Lane, Longridge. The store was open late for 'Longridge does Christmas' and Steve and Helen Millington generously allowed us to sell calendars and raffle tickets from their shop. The sales and donations raised over £120 for the Wetlands and we are tremendously grateful to all concerned.

We also had a stall at the Alston Lane Primary School Christmas Fair. This proved to be another successful fundraiser with over £130 raised for the Trust (the 'lollipop stick' game proved to be particularly popular!). Many thanks to the School for letting us participate in their event - it was much appreciated.

Our final Christmas Fair was 'Grimsargh Does Christmas', at the Village Hall, where we raised over £160. A big thank you to Lindsay Philipson and her team for putting on such a well run event!

Finally, it is worth mentioning that a certain Trustee undertook a number of assignments on behalf of Father Christmas in the lead-up to Christmas that, in addition to delighting numerous local children, also raised significant funds for the Wetlands! A special thank you to Swifts Hardware Store, Longridge and Ribchester Club for their generous donations to the Trust following their Father Christmas events.

Taken together, these events raised well over £400 for the Wetlands and, once again, we would like to thank all concerned – all the event organisers, the Trustees and volunteers who looked after the stalls and all who generously gave items for the Christmas hampers (even the multiple Christmas puddings!).

The Trust will continue to have a stall at the Grimsargh Farmers Market events throughout 2020. As a reminder, if you have any paperback books, cds or dvds that you would like to donate for the stall, please contact Andy (email: babdiene7@talktalk.net).

Membership information

Current membership fees are as follows:

Individual - £20

Life - £100

Corporate - £50

Volunteers - £10 – (if a member attends 3 volunteer days per year).

If you need to update your contact details or have any other queries about membership (e.g. requests to upgrade to Life membership) then you should contact Jayne Woollam (email: jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk).

Volunteer Days and Guided Walks

There will be volunteer days and guided walks as shown below:

Saturday 7th March - volunteer day

Sunday 15th March - volunteer day

Sunday 29th March – Spring Flower Walk

Saturday 4th April - volunteer day

Saturday 11th April - guided walk

Sunday 26th April - volunteer day

Sunday 10th May – guided walk

Sunday 24th May – volunteer Day

The arrangements for volunteer days and guided walks (start time, where to meet etc.) are always announced on the Wetlands Facebook page. Additionally, if you would like to be added to the volunteers mailing list, then please contact Jayne Woollam (email: jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk).

Please note that, providing they are accompanied by a responsible adult, young people, under 16, can volunteer or attend guided walks.

Team-leaders will ensure that everyone is able to contribute to volunteer days, irrespective of age, experience or fitness levels! Please ensure that warm, waterproof clothing and strong

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boots/wellingtons are worn. Appropriate tools will be supplied along with plenty of refreshments.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Lesley Walker, Andy Small, Jayne Woollam, Geoff Carefoot, Richard Moss and Mark Ashmore for allowing the use of their photographs. We are grateful to our sponsors and the Lancashire Environmental Fund for their generous financial support. A full list of our current sponsors can be found on the 2020 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar.

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