

# Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

**Autumn 2020**



## **Welcome**

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter. The recent months have been difficult for everyone. At the time of writing, many of us are adjusting to a 'new normal' way of life. The Trust is no different. Although many of the Trust's key activities remain seriously disrupted, work is continuing and you can read about our current and planned activities here. Of course, throughout the pandemic, the Wetlands wildlife has thrived and provided much needed enjoyment and solace for so many visitors. In this newsletter we highlight the magnificent work of our Wetlands photographers and showcase their stunning images of some of our most photogenic summer wildlife.

We hope you enjoy reading your newsletter. Finally, if you are visiting the Wetlands this Autumn, please do remember the continued importance of 'social distancing', the need for vigilance regarding contact with surfaces such as gates and handrails and the on-going importance of rigorous hand hygiene.

With best wishes,

The Trustees

## **News**

### *Funding Success*

The Trust is delighted to announce that it has recently been awarded a grant for £3,000 from the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity. This charity primarily provides funding for capital projects in the villages of Lancashire and South Cumbria. You can read about their aims here: <http://www.haroldandalicebridgescharity.co.uk>.

In our case, the funding was provided in support of work to improve habitat quality and diversity on the site. Specifically, it will support efforts to improve the attractiveness of the central reservoir to a range of wading birds and other wildlife. In parallel with this work, improvements will be made to viewing areas for visitors watching birdlife on the central reservoir. Contractors will, in time, be engaged to undertake the work and progress will be reported in future newsletters. The Trust, is truly grateful to the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity for their extremely generous financial support, particularly in the context of the current, extraordinary, circumstances. Finally, the Trust is indebted to trustees Andy Small and Geoff Carefoot who prepared and submitted the application, together with other supporting material, on behalf on the Trust.

### *The Wild Flower Re-seeding Project*



The wild-flower display behind the new viewing screens.

One of the last jobs that volunteers were able to undertake before the imposition of 'lock-down' was re-seeding, with a mixture of wild flower and grass seeds, some of the areas around the new viewing screens and ramp. This work has rewarded us with some tremendous displays of

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vibrant summer colours over recent months. The success of this re-seeding is due, in no small part, to the efforts of trustees Andy Small and Phil Atkinson, volunteer Steve Lunt and others in ensuring adequate watering of the seedlings, when at their most vulnerable, and we are all tremendously grateful for their efforts.



Just a small part of the newly re-seeded areas around the Compound.

The mixture of wildflower and grasses chosen was a specialist '*Butterflies & Bees*' mixture containing 25 native species of wild flowers (20%) and a range of meadow grasses (80%). As the name suggests, the mixture is pollen and nectar rich and, as such, is optimised to be particularly attractive to a wide range of pollinating insects. You can view the precise contents of the mixture at <https://www.pitchcare.com/shop/butterflies-beezz.html>. As you will see, one of the features of this particular mixture is that different flowers come into bloom throughout the period between May and October meaning that a constant, but ever changing, display can be achieved.

Unfortunately, 'lock-down' curtailed our re-seeding plans; nonetheless, the work that was possible does show what can be achieved. We certainly hope that, next year, it will be possible to undertake a significantly more extensive re-seeding programme with a particular emphasis on developing the wild flower meadow area adjacent to the Compound. Additionally, other specialist seed mixtures will be used in, for

example, those areas of the site that are known to be rich in limestone. In support of this re-seeding programme, the trustees have approved the purchase of a small water pump in order to make the task of watering seedlings significantly less 'back-breaking'.

In the long-term, it is hoped to encourage the successful re-colonisation of the site with as many native wild flowers as possible. This will only be possible with our continued vigilance regarding the removal of invasive willow and scrub and the removal on non-native species such as Himalayan balsam. In this context, the ongoing '*balsam bashing*' efforts of Warden, Ken Mayor deserve a special mention. Indeed, the relatively low levels of Himalayan balsam currently on site are a tribute to Ken's efforts in previous years.

### Cable Drums

Early in August, the Trust took delivery of our first batch of cable drums (or reels). These wooden drums typically hold the electrical or fibre optic cables used by electrical, and other, contractors working on cabling projects. Once the cable has been used, it turns out that there are a plethora of uses for the empty drums – everything from garden furniture to art installations! What, you may ask, does the Trust intend to do with cable drums?



Trustee Steve Whittam (right) takes delivery of the first cable drums donated by Story Homes and Grain Broadband.

Cable drums make ideal rafts – a useful way of providing island habitat in areas of relatively



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deep water. As such, they can improve the breeding success of birds (e.g. terns and waders) by providing areas safe from terrestrial predators. They can also provide wildfowl with 'loafing' spots or resting places.

Rafts intended to encourage nesting by terns and waders are usually devoid of vegetation and, instead, are covered with gravel. You may well be familiar with the tern rafts/pontoons at Preston Dock and you can read about that, incredibly successful, project at <http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/preston-dock-terns.html>. Our plan is to use a series of cable drums to create rafts that we hope will prove attractive nesting sites for terns and waders on the Wetlands. We are therefore particularly grateful to Story Homes and their subcontractor, Grain Broadband who responded to our plea for discarded cable drums and have now delivered the first batch of drums for use in our 'Tern Raft' project. Special thanks go to Joanne in the Story Homes Sales Office at Elston Park, Grimsargh who coordinated the delivery of the drums.

### Wildlife Highlights - Birds

Visitors to the Wetlands have been treated to an abundance of superb wildlife over the summer months. Before reviewing some of these highlights it would be remiss not to pay tribute to the tireless individuals who maintain records of the Wetlands wildlife throughout the seasons. Trust Chair David Hindle and trustee Geoff Carefoot regularly record their observations of Wetlands birdlife on the ELOC (East Lancashire Ornithologists Club) website - records that are available for all to see here <https://www.eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/Rep-Birdlist.aspx>. Likewise, Warden Ken Maylor records avian and other wildlife highlights in his regular 'Warden's Report' on the Wetlands Facebook page – an ideal starting point for any visitor looking for 'up to the minute' information about what to look out for on their Wetlands walks. In addition, we are incredibly fortunate to have a small but passionate band of dedicated photographers who painstakingly

record the Wetlands flora and fauna, throughout the year. Both Richard Moss and Gerry Small devote many hours to capturing photographic records of life on the Wetlands. Furthermore, both Richard and Gerry willingly share the fruits of their labours on the Wetlands Facebook page, thereby bringing the wildlife of the Wetlands into anyone's home – something that has been appreciated by so many in these difficult times.

In Spring there were encouraging signs that this could be a 'bumper' year for waders. The hot sunny days that characterised much of the period of 'lock-down' resulted in decreased water levels on the Wetlands and, as a consequence, the exposure of large areas of mud and sand surrounded by shallow water, especially in the middle reservoir. Such conditions provide wonderful feeding opportunities for waders and we were rewarded with visits by small numbers of Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, a single Greenshank and an, all too fleeting, return visit by a Great White Egret.

The freshly exposed feeding areas certainly proved attractive to the 'regular' Wetlands waders with Oystercatchers, Lapwing, Little Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpiper all seen frequently. There was also evidence of breeding attempts by all these waders; however, these attempts were, once again, largely unsuccessful. Fortunately, photographer Richard Moss was able to record the success of a family of Oystercatchers.



Parent Oystercatcher with offspring (photograph by Richard Moss).

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This lack of breeding success remains a disappointment. Avian predation is an issue. Visitors to the Wetlands may well have seen gulls (particularly the Lesser Black-backed Gulls) targeting eggs and chicks. Another issue is the prevalence of geese on the islands of the middle reservoir, where many of the waders attempt to nest. Unfortunately, the geese are rather 'clumsy' and many nests and eggs are trampled. The good news is that our most recent grant funding (see elsewhere in this newsletter) will allow us to make the islands less attractive to geese and; hopefully, safer for waders, their nests and young.

With the arrival of June, the hot and dry weather gave way to, more typical, wet and warm English summer weather. This meant that the water levels rose, the extensive feeding areas were re-submerged and the site, once again, became rather less attractive to waders of all kinds. As a consequence, the anticipated 'bumper' year for waders never materialised. Nonetheless, there were still some avian surprises in store.

The Wetlands is frequented by, often abundant, numbers of black-headed gulls. It often pays to look through such groups, as the meticulous observer can be rewarded with a surprise sighting. This is exactly the type of pain-staking work often carried out by Warden Ken Maylor. Ken was able to confirm the presence of several Mediterranean Gulls 'hidden' amongst the large numbers of Black-headed Gulls on the central reservoir, on a number of occasions in June. At first glance, the Black-headed Gull and Mediterranean Gull are similar and, as a consequence, the relatively rare Mediterranean Gull (around 600 breeding pairs across the UK compared with the estimated 140,000 breeding pairs of Black-headed Gulls in the UK) is often overlooked by the casual observer.

Key identifying features, in summer, include: size – the adult Mediterranean Gull is the slightly larger of the two; colour of the head – the Mediterranean Gull has a 'jet-black' head (the extent of colouration resembles a hood)

whereas the Black-headed Gull is actually a 'deep chocolate brown' colour that distinctively curves up at the back (reminiscent of the 'short back' in a 'short-back and sides' hair cut!); the wing-tips of the adult Mediterranean Gull are white whereas those of the Black-headed Gull are dark grey/black. Finally, the adult Mediterranean Gull has a distinctive scarlet bill matched with similarly brightly coloured legs whereas the adult Black-headed Gull has rather darker red legs and bill. Can you identify the Mediterranean Gull(s) in the following image?



A mixed group of Black-headed Gulls and Mediterranean Gull(s?) with a lone Canada Goose in the background.

The final avian highlight of the summer was the discovery of a pair of nesting Tawny owls. The owls were making use a nest box in the back garden of Trust Chair, David Hindle.



A Wetlands Tawny owl (photograph by Richard Moss).

David's garden backs onto the Southern boundary of the Wetlands and the owls spent a



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considerable amount of time in the trees in that area thereby providing some excellent, daytime, photo-opportunities. This enabled photographer Richard Moss to record some memorable images (see above). At the beginning of July, David reported that the pair of owls had successfully reared several youngsters. This delighted local residents who were, on occasions, lucky enough to see (and hear!) the family of owls in their back gardens.

### *Summer wildlife highlights - insects*

There is, of course, so much more to the Wetlands than the avian fauna. The summer months are a particularly good time to observe and record the insect life of the Wetlands. Insects also provide an opportunity for our photographers to show off their 'macro'-photography skills.

Regarding butterflies, there are two notable observations to mention. Firstly, as reported in our Spring Newsletter, a colony of Ringlet butterflies is now well established on the Wetlands and it is pleasing to report that, once again, trustee Andy Small has been able to record large numbers (up to 100 in an afternoon) of Ringlets. This confirms that our site really is pre-eminent, in Lancashire, for this species.



A fine example of a Wetlands Ringlet butterfly (photograph by Gerry Small).

In contrast to the Ringlet, numbers of Painted Lady butterflies have been very low this year. You may recall how lucky we were, last year,

when the whole country experienced a summer-long invasion by this species. This year has been very different – undoubtedly not helped by the rather wet, and sometimes cool, weather of late.

Other insects that have not greatly appreciated the wetter weather conditions are the Wetlands dragonflies and damselflies. These are undoubtedly present in abundance, it's just that they really are at their most active on hot (the hotter the better!) and sunny days. Nonetheless, our ever-reliable photographers have been on hand to record these colourful flying insects whenever the opportunity presented itself. Perhaps the most notable record is the pristine Broad-bodied Chaser recorded by Gerry Small.



Perched Broad-bodied Chaser Dragonfly (photograph by Gerry Small).

Interestingly, the last photographic record of a Broad-bodied Chaser on the site was by our other Wetlands photographer, Richard Moss, as long ago as 2016. These dragonflies are not particularly rare locally; however, they have never been particularly prevalent on the Wetlands. Hopefully this situation will change in the coming years. Our intention to create a series of small wildlife ponds should prove very attractive to this species – which is often one of the first to colonise new ponds. The key identifying feature of this dragonfly is the rather fat and flattened abdomen which is golden yellow/brown in the female (and immature male) and a very distinctive powder blue in the mature male. If you are looking for Broad-bodied Chasers, then one particularly valuable

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viewing tip is that, if disturbed, they will often willingly return to the same low perching position – enabling the patient photographer to have a second attempt at capturing their image!

The Broad-bodied Chaser is one of our larger dragonflies. In complete contrast, are the much smaller and more fragile looking damselflies. There are extremely large number of damselflies on the Wetlands (two of the most abundant being the Common Blue damselfly and the Blue-tailed damselfly). The Blue-tailed damselfly is particularly interesting in that there are a number of extremely colourful variants to be found. This variation is illustrated by two of Gerry Small's photographs (below).



Blue-tailed damselflies with a) blue/black thorax and b) orange-pink/black thorax (photographs by Gerry Small).

This variation is confined to the female damselflies and relates to the colour of the thorax. By far the most common variant 'typica' has a blue/black thorax in both male and females. In other variants the thorax may be

violet (*violacea*), olive-green (*infuscans*), brown (*infuscans-obseleta*) or as, in Gerry's second photograph, orange-pink (*rufescens*). All these variants can be found on the Wetlands.

Finally, a rather unusual image. We are all familiar with the brightly coloured adult Ladybird. Less commonly recorded are the larvae of these insects. Richard Moss rectified this with a wonderfully detailed, close-up, image of a pair of larvae of the 7 Spot Ladybird, the UK's most common Ladybird.



Larvae of the 7 Spot Ladybird (Photograph by Richard Moss).

## Fund-raising activities

The first of the 'Covid-secure' outdoor Grimsargh Farmers' Markets was held on 20<sup>th</sup> June and trustee Andy Small was present with his ever-expanding collection of books, cds and dvds. As a further incentive to shoppers and browsers, a splendid Fathers Day Hamper was there for the taking for anyone who could correctly guess the combined total of that Saturday night's lottery balls.



'Open air' Grimsargh Farmers' Markets (photograph by Andy Small).



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In addition to the monthly Farmers Markets, Andy has also organised a series of outdoor 'pop-up' events at Grimsargh Club and The Plough, Grimsargh. The book sale outside Grimsargh Club on 11<sup>th</sup> July was particularly notable for being a joint fund-raising effort with the proceeds being split equally between Grimsargh Wetlands Trust and the RSPCA, Ribbleson Branch. That particular event raised £160; in addition, an extremely generous donation of pet food was made to the RSPCA.

### *A unique fund-raising venture*

As you will be aware, at the height of the pandemic, there was a desperate need for all manner of PPE (personal protective equipment) for NHS staff. Locally, a number of skilled seamstresses devoted a great deal of time and effort to the production of scrubs, scrub bags, head bands and masks for staff at the Royal Preston Hospital and elsewhere. Currently, with apparently adequate supplies available to NHS staff, the need is rather different. Instead, the demand is for masks and face coverings for members of the public.

Volunteer Sue Atkinson, has responded to these demands, and having spent her 'lock-down' time creating PPE for NHS staff, she has now turned her attention to the creation of masks for the general public. Proceeds from the sale of each mask are donated to the Wetlands. Using an amazing range of brightly coloured fabrics donated by neighbour, Anne Lupton, Sue is able to create a uniquely coloured/patterned 'three layer' mask in around 20 min. The masks meet WHO face covering recommendations - as well as being an indispensable fashion accessory! It is left to husband (and trustee) Phil to package the finished products ready for sale at Andy's pop-up sales events and the outdoor Farmers' Markets. At the time of writing, Sue has made over 80 masks and they have proved to be a runaway success with queues forming and stocks selling out. In the process, of course, much needed funds are raised for the Trust.



A small selection of the masks created by Volunteer Sue Atkinson  
(photograph by Sue Atkinson).

### *Volunteer Days and Guided Walks*

These activities are currently suspended; however, if and when we are able to safely restart them, we will email you with details.

### *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](mailto:jaynewoollam@hotmail.co.uk)).

**Please note.** Any general queries about the work of the Trust should be sent to [grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com](mailto:grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com).

### *Acknowledgements*

We thank Richard Moss, Gerry Small, Andy Small and Sue Atkinson for allowing the use of

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their photographs. We are grateful to the Alice and Harold Bridges Charity and the Lancashire Environmental Fund for their generous financial support. A full list of our local sponsors can be found on the 2020 Grimsargh Wetlands Calendar. The Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is a registered charity N° 1173037.

**LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND**