

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter



Winter 2025

Welcome

Welcome to your Winter Newsletter. We, once again, find ourselves facing the challenge of a dramatic increase in cases of avian influenza ('bird flu') throughout the country. You can read more about the current situation in this newsletter. The key things to remember, if you visit the Wetlands, are summarised in the poster provided by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (see below).



At the time of writing, we are not aware of any cases on the Wetlands; however, given the on-going concerns, vigilance from everyone is clearly required.

The autumn months have been a very busy time on the Wetlands and you can read all about the recent work done, both by contractors and our volunteers, here. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers and supporters for their continued hard work and

generosity, with their time and money, throughout the past year. Simply put, without your support and hard work, Grimsargh Wetlands would be lost to the local community.

As always, we will be holding a 'Winter Walk' between Christmas and the New Year and we hope to see you there. Seasonal best wishes to all our readers and supporters.

The Trustees

The Big Butterfly Count

Although the warm, sunny days of summer already seem a long time ago, you will recall our optimism regarding the number, and variety, of butterflies observed, especially in contrast to the dismal numbers recorded in 2024. It is therefore sobering to review the recently published results of the annual 'Big Butterfly Count' (full details of the results are shown here - <https://butterfly-conservation.org/big-butterfly-count-results-2025>).

While confirming that the number of butterflies recorded in 2025 was a vast improvement on 2024, in the broader context of recent years, it was only modestly successful. This was despite the fact that we experienced record-breaking, warm, dry and sunny spring and summer months in 2025 – ideal conditions in which you would expect butterflies to flourish.

The most frequently recorded species in the national count were Large White, Small White, Gatekeeper, Red Admiral and Meadow Brown. All of these could be seen on the Wetlands (and elsewhere locally) during the summer months.



Gatekeeper on the Wetlands.

The results of the count confirm that while some species had a better than average summer, nearly a third of species had a poor time - even in the favourable weather. Notably, the Small Tortoiseshell, which all but disappeared in 2024, showed some improvement in numbers but, nonetheless, still had a below average year and, overall, has declined by a staggering 60% since 2011.

These results clearly show that butterflies, key indicators of ecological health and environmental quality, continue to face unrelenting pressures from habitat loss, climate change and pesticide use.

Summer Bug Hunt



Trustee Geoff Carefoot inspecting the moth trap.

Butterflies were one of our main targets when we held our annual 'Bug Hunt' in late August. The weather was kind and it was heartening to see a number of young families, and other members of the local community, came along

and enjoy an afternoon on the Wetlands. One of the highlights of the afternoon was the 'Big Reveal' when trustee Geoff Carefoot opened his moth trap and the children were able to see the fruits of an overnight 'trapping' session. Geoff, an experienced moth and butterfly enthusiast, was able to identify the moths. Most notably, there was an abundance of Large Yellow Underwings, some Centre-barred Sallows and a tremendous Poplar Hawk-moth which, very obligingly, sat on the hands of some of the awe-struck young naturalists. Of course, all the moths were safely released back onto the Wetlands. All none the worse for their experience.



'Mini-beast' identification on the Bug Hunt.

We were extremely fortunate that one of our major sponsors – HAN communications (<https://hancommunications.com/>) generously provided insect inspection kits for the children to use on the walk. This allowed the children to catch and inspect a number of different 'mini-beasts' as they explored the embankments. Many species were successfully identified before being released again. As anticipated, a variety of butterflies, damselflies, dragonflies, hoverflies and bees, along with numerous spiders, were seen as we walked around the site.

Of the butterfly species seen, highlights included Green-veined White, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Comma and Painted Lady. As always, the abundant Buddleia, along the embankments, lived up to their reputation as 'butterfly magnets'.

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A Mast Year

Those of you who visited the Wetlands during the autumn months cannot fail to have noticed the ‘carpet’ of acorns underfoot. Alongside this abundance of acorns, many trees in our gardens, and more generally across the countryside, have been over-loaded with an abundance of berries and fruit this year. This phenomenon is often referred to as a ‘Mast Year’- an event that only occurs, very approximately, every 5 years or so.

In normal years, much of the crop of berries, fruit, seeds and nuts is eaten by birds and small mammals. In a mast year sufficient crop remains uneaten to allow many seeds to germinate and produce saplings. For example, in the case of Beech trees in non-mast years, seed-eating birds and mammals have been estimated to consume nearly 100% of the crop. In contrast, in mast years, over half of the seed crop might remain uneaten and, as a consequence, goes on to germinate and develop.



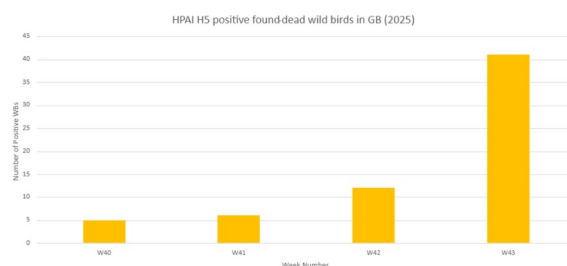
*A mat of acorns on the Wetlands public footpath
(Photograph by Hannah McGivern).*

That 2025 appears to be a mast year, probably reflects (as in the case of butterfly numbers – see above), the particular weather conditions early in the year. A warm, dry spring is ideal for pollination and seed development is sensitive to patterns of rainfall and temperature. However, there may well be more to the occurrence of ‘masting’ than just a particular combination of weather conditions. The details of how crop production is synchronised across large numbers of woodland trees remain unclear. There is speculation that communication using

chemical signals released into the air or mycorrhizal networks (the underground network of fungal material that interacts so closely with the root systems of trees and other plants) might contribute to trees coordinating their masting times.

Masting in 2025 means that the crop next year is likely to be much smaller. These changes in yearly crops obviously have knock-on effects on the populations of the small mammals (mice, voles, squirrels etc.) that feed, along with birds such as Jays, on the nuts and seeds. Fluctuations in populations of small mammals will have a consequent impact on predator populations (owls, kestrels, stoats etc.). All this clearly illustrates the ecological interactions and dependencies in our woodlands and wetlands.

Avian Influenza Update



Recent avian influenza positive ‘found-dead’ wild birds
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-bird-flu-in-europe>).

As indicated in the introduction to this newsletter, there are currently real concerns about the spread of avian influenza in wild birds across the country. After a relatively quiet period over the summer months, October saw a marked increase in confirmed cases in wild birds – mostly inland resident wildfowl (Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Mute Swan and Mallard). Through November, the number of cases of migrant Whooper Swan infected with the virus has also increased markedly.

Unfortunately, although cases are increasing across the UK, there appears to be a prevalence of cases in our part of the country. As a consequence, the wild bird risk is currently

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classified as very high. A significant factor in this assessment is the fact that migratory waterbirds are currently entering the country from Europe (and will continue to do so until the New Year). Across Europe, there have been exponential increases in reported cases over recent weeks. For example, there have been notable mass mortalities of Cranes migrating into France. As a consequence, the ongoing situation in Europe is considered, by the UK government, to be 'dire'.



This bleak assessment, once again, highlights the need for vigilance from all of us, irrespective of whether we are taking a walk on the Wetlands or topping-up the garden bird feeders. Avoid contact with dead wild birds, feathers or faecal material. Keep bird feeders clean and always thoroughly wash hands after handling bird-feeders. Despite all the grim news regarding wild birds, the risk to humans remains low as long as these simple, sensible precautions are followed.

Annual Site Maintenance

Our regular contractors, Wilkinson Landscaping (Hutton), were working on the Wetlands for several days during early October. As always, their visit resulted in dramatic changes to the appearance of the embankments after this 'autumnal haircut'. It is perhaps worth reiterating the importance of this work in providing much better opportunities for wild flowers to flourish on the embankments.

It is noteworthy that the introduction of a rigorous scrub clearance programme on the embankments of the Mere has dramatically

enhanced the display of spring wild flowers – particularly the Early Purple Orchids, Primroses and Wood Anemones. As a consequence, at the height of their flowering season, orchids are now easily seen, in abundance, from our main viewing screens.



The Wilkinson Landscaping team at work on the Wetlands (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Visits by the Ribble River Trust and Fylde Rangers



Bundling willow on the Wetlands.

We were delighted that, once again, two of our closest partner organisations spent time working on the Wetlands over the recent weeks. Both the Ribble Rivers Trust (ribbletrust.org.uk/) and the Fylde Ranger Service (www.facebook.com/FyldeRangerService/) are regular visitors and are a tremendous help to us with our winter maintenance work. Both groups can make good use of willow – something, you are undoubtedly aware, we have more than enough of. In the past, the Ribble Rivers Trust team

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have used willow bundles extensively in their various environmental projects aimed at mitigating erosion of banks on local streams and becks (e.g. <https://ribbletrust.org.uk/restoring-hasgill-beck-a-brash-bundling-project-for-healthy-rivers/>).

The Fylde Rangers use the collected willow in their tremendously popular wreath-making classes held in the weeks leading up to Christmas. They also use it in a number of other community projects such as the creation of raised beds in the public parks of Lytham St. Annes.



The result of a successful day's willow cutting and bundling on the Wetlands.

A major plus for us is that both groups were able to use their trimmers and other equipment to deal with some of the larger shrubs and trees threatening to overwhelm the embankments (particularly in front of our viewing screens). In addition, you will recall that we have considerable problems with ash dieback and a number of dead trees were easily removed.



One of the Fylde Rangers at work on the embankments.

We are indebted to both teams for their help in this way and we very much look forward to seeing them again next year.

Volunteer Maintenance Sessions

We've had a successful series of autumn volunteer work sessions. We were lucky in that only one session had to be abandoned as a result of torrential rain that made working on the embankments an unsafe and seriously unpleasant endeavour. Essentially, our volunteer sessions have focussed on three different areas of work: care of growing saplings, clearance and cleaning of spillways and raft maintenance.



New 'upgraded' stakes for saplings alongside the public footpath.

Over the past few years we have undertaken a programme of planting saplings of berry-bearing trees, especially along the public footpath that bisects the Wetlands. These have mostly grown surprisingly well and in many cases they have out-grown their original stakes. We have therefore undertaken a schedule of replacing/upgrading stakes to ensure that the growing trees are well supported and given some protection from winter wind and storm damage. This all necessitated quite a bit of preparatory work clearing away the surrounding brambles and other scrub before the existing stakes could be replaced.

Hopefully, the new stakes will be adequate for a few more year to come after which time the growing trees may well not need further support. The good news is that many of the

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saplings were showing an abundance of berries - ready and waiting for any winter thrushes that visit the Wetlands in the coming weeks.



Volunteers at work clearing the main Island Lake spillway.

The second area of work for the volunteers was spillway maintenance. As always, this involved removal of the extensive new growth of scrub. This allowed the original stonework to be exposed and ensured that the spillways were free of any blockages and obstructions. Exposing the stonework was particularly back-breaking work and was definitely a case where many hands really do make light work.

The final task was raft maintenance. This involved removal of nest trays for cleaning and repair along with cleaning of the raft platforms and the removal of some stubbornly growing vegetation. In a couple of cases, rafts that were in danger of becoming submerged or, even worse, sinking were moved to the embankments of the Mere so that remedial work on their flotation aids could be carried out.



Cleaning the tern rafts on the Mere.

As always, this work would not have been possible without the help of long-term supporter of the Wetlands, Ian Milnes, who brought along his outboard motor and expertise to help us with this vital maintenance work. Many thanks to Ian for his continuing enthusiastic support.

Wetlands Stall and Calendars

During the lead-up to Christmas, Trustee Lesley Walker has overseen a Grimsargh Wetlands stall in the Village Hall as part of the monthly Farmers' Market. She has sold Wetlands calendars together with packs of our greetings cards. The latter feature a stunning aerial view of the Wetlands, courtesy of local photographer Mark Ashmore.



The Wetlands stall at the Grimsargh Farmers' Market (photograph by Lesley Walker).

In addition, a variety of bird feeders, nest boxes and bat boxes - provided by Lindsay Simons at "Animal Crackers" - have been available for purchase. We are tremendously grateful to Lindsay for her continuing generosity. Many thanks go to all the people who purchased items from the stall.

Remember, all the proceeds from the stall go directly to supporting the work of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust. We are extremely grateful to Lesley for giving up her Saturday mornings in order to run the stall for us.



The 2026 Wetlands Calendar on sale at the Farmers' Market (photograph by Lesley Walker).

In addition to being available at the Farmers' Market stall, a number of local businesses have also been selling our calendars and/or hosting a Wetlands Donations Tub. Thanks therefore go to Grimsargh Village Store, The Plough, Grimsargh and Blue Moon Computers, Longridge for their efforts – which are greatly appreciated.

Winter Walk

We plan to hold a 'Winter Guided Walk' at 10 am on Saturday 27th December and we have our fingers crossed for good weather on the day. If you wish to attend the guided walk, please use the online booking system on our website to book your place and see the latest information regarding the arrangements for the day. Do remember to 'dress for the weather' - warm clothing and strong waterproof boots will be essential!

Volunteer Days

Our proposed winter volunteer work schedule for the New Year is as follows:

Sunday 4th January
Saturday 17th January

Sunday 1st February
Saturday 14th February

Sunday 1st March
Saturday 14th March

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

CHOOSE
GRIMSARGH WETLANDS
FOR YOUR
CORPORATE AWAY DAY



✉ grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com

If your company is looking for an opportunity to volunteer locally as part of your CSR (Corporate Responsibility Commitments) strategy, why not consider coming to Grimsargh Wetlands for the day?

We welcome groups of volunteers from a wide range of organisations and businesses who want to make a difference in the communities in which they work. There is always maintenance

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work to be done. If you would like to enquire about organising an 'Away Day' for your team, 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 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 – dotted.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. If visiting the Wetlands, please remember there is, unfortunately, 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 Hannah McGivern, Geoff Carefoot and Lesley Walker for allowing the use of their 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

