
Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter



Autumn 2024

Welcome

Welcome to your latest newsletter. The cold and wet months of spring and early summer continues to take their toll on nature. You can read more about the impact on insects, particularly the stark decline in butterfly numbers this year, in this newsletter. It's not just butterflies that have been in short supply with plenty of anecdotal evidence that other insects – moths, hoverflies, bees and wasps – are all struggling. In this context, you may also be interested to read about the results of our own summer 'Bug Hunt'.

A 'knock-on' effect of poor insect numbers is that birds, that rely on a steady supply of insects during their nesting season, have also struggled this year. There have been plenty of reports of failed nesting attempts and unusual nesting behaviour as birds try to make up for the loss of early broods.

On a much more positive note, we are delighted to announce some much needed grant-funding success and you can read about our new projects here. As is often the case, we are required to cover a portion of the project costs from our own funds. We are therefore immensely grateful to all those of you who support us and make donations, no matter how small, to the Trust. A special thank you goes to everyone who drops their 'small change' into the collection box at Grimsargh Village Store. A big thank you also goes to all who supported us and took part in our highly successful Grimsargh Field Day tombola. Thank you all – your generosity is greatly appreciated.

The Trustees

Big Butterfly Count



There were good numbers of Orange-tip butterflies on the Wetlands earlier this year but other species have fared less well.

You may recall that each year, during July and August, Butterfly Conservation (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>) organise a 'Big Butterfly Count'. The purpose of this 'citizen science' project is to track changes in butterfly populations and distributions over the years (decades now). As has been said before, butterflies are a key indicator of environmental and ecological health and there has been a steep decline in butterfly numbers over the past fifty years (80% of UK butterfly species have declined since the 1970s). There are a number of, well documented, reasons for this decline. Climate change, habitat loss and over-use of pesticides have all contributed to the problem. However, this year, it appears that these effects have been compounded by the particularly cold and wet spring and early summer period.

The consequence of this is that, at the time of writing, the Big Butterfly Count has recorded only around half the number of butterflies found at the same time last year. This means that, currently, the numbers recorded are the lowest

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ever seen in the 14 year history of the Big Butterfly Count. Quite simply, the already depleted populations now have little resilience in the face of adverse weather conditions and other environmental stress factors.

Of course, it's not just butterflies that have suffered with the cold and wet weather. You may have noticed recent stories in the national press regarding a sharp decline in UK wasp populations this year. Buglife (<https://www.buglife.org.uk/>) suggest that the prolonged cold and wet weather, together with unprecedented winter flooding, have led to poor over-wintering of wasps. Ultimately, as with butterflies, a lack of wasps (no matter how annoying they can be for our picnic plans!) leads to poor pollination. Additionally, an abundance of greenfly and other insect larvae, usually controlled by healthy wasp populations, can be anticipated.

Grimsargh Field Day and Longridge Show

Grimsargh Field Day took place, in glorious weather, on Saturday 22nd June. As always, the day started with the parade from the Village Hall to the Village Green. You will perhaps recall that, last year, Grimsargh Wetlands was represented in the parade by two unexpected guests. 'Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay', took part in the parade shaking collection boxes for the Wetlands as they 'roped' their way along the parade route.



Shackleton's Antarctic expedition team on parade in support of the Wetlands.

This year, it was a pair of Antarctic explorers from Earnest Shackleton's 1907 British Antarctic expedition (the 'Nimrod' expedition) that joined the parade in support of the Wetlands. While the explorers pulled their sledge loaded with supplies, they were accompanied by volunteers shaking collection boxes in support of the Wetlands.



Everyone, including Antarctic explorers, tried their luck with the tombola!

After the parade, the explorers spent the afternoon at our stall, where they chatted to people about the Wetlands (and the merits of Reindeer skin boots and mitts on a hot and humid afternoon in Grimsargh!). This year, our stall was a tremendous success. This was thanks, in no small part, to trustee Lesley Walker's tombola which attracted a constant stream of customers throughout the afternoon.



The tombola prizes – all of which were won by visitors to our stall on the afternoon!

Overall, the Trust raised close to £300 on the day which was a tremendous achievement and

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we thank all those who made donations, took part in the tombola or purchased bird/bat boxes or bird feeders (generously donated by one of our key sponsors, Animal Crackers <https://www.animalcrackers.co.uk/>). We are also grateful to those who donated such a wonderful selection of prizes for the tombola. Our thanks go to all who supported us and helped out with the parade and the stall.

Longridge Show took place on Saturday 6th July and, once again, we had a stall in the Community Marquee. Trustees were on hand to answer questions about the Wetlands and opportunities for group-visits and volunteering.



Trustee Lesley Walker at our Longridge Show stall.

It remains a concern to us that, at these events, the most frequent comment is still *'I've lived here for x years but I didn't know we had a local nature reserve!'* Likewise, the most frequently asked question remains *'Where is Grimsargh Wetlands – how can I get there?'* Clearly, notwithstanding the popularity of the Wetlands Facebook page and website, together with our extensive local 'leafleting campaign' last summer, we still have work to do.

Funding Success

We are delighted to report that the Trust has recently had success with grant applications to two different external funding bodies. The funding is for two very different projects. These are the replacement of the Trust's work boat and

the replacement of a significant portion of the old and dilapidated wooden fencing along the public footpath. Regarding the new boat, trustee Geoff Carefoot explains:

'The Trust's planning sub-committee has highlighted a number of areas where the on-going maintenance, development of habitats, and enhancement of visitor experience can be improved. One of the requirements was for a more stable boat to enable volunteers to work more safely on the Mere and Island lake. We were very appreciative of the sailing dinghy ('Jasmine') which was kindly given to us at the outset of our work to improve the Wetlands but a vessel with a much shallower draught, much more stability and a better load carrying capacity was becoming essential.'



The old - 'Jasmine' in action earlier this year while positioning the new tern raft.

In the past, Pre-covid, we approached the Harold and Alice Bridges Trust (<https://www.haroldandalicebridgescharity.co.uk/>), a local charity specifically benefitting local villages, to help us fund putting in a drop-board sluice to help us regulate the water level in the Island Lake and were successful. Approaching them again to see if funding might be available for some of our planned work we discovered that their trustees were meeting imminently to decide on bids they had received. The amount of funding we were likely to receive (plus our own percentage input) tallied closely with the cost of the boat we had decided upon so a bid was very quickly put together and submitted.

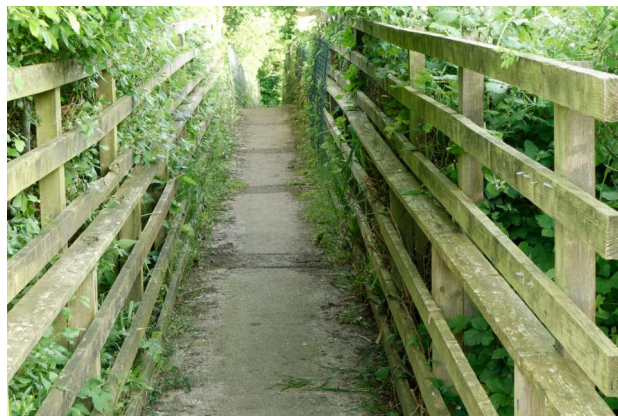


The new - a Rigidflex Aquapecte 370 boat.

We are delighted to report that we have been successful and that currently we are awaiting delivery of our new work boat which will be used during autumn to bring in our older, circular tern rafts (so successfully colonised by breeding black-headed gulls!) for cleaning and maintenance, towing in our newer dedicated tern raft for re-positioning in spring, moving a tonne of beach gravel from the Compound to the islands, during winter when the water level is at its maximum, to make the islands more appealing to breeding waders and generally being able to control some of the waterside vegetation around the Mere.'

The second project for which we have received funding concerns the replacement of a substantial portion of the wooden fencing along the public footpath together with a number of other specified fencing improvements. Those of you who visit the Wetlands regularly will no doubt have noticed that much of the wooden fencing along the public footpath is now showing it's age (much of the wooden fencing is nearly 20 years old). For some time, the Trust has been looking at options for repair or replacement of this fencing. Trustee Jayne Woollam spent a great deal of time 'chasing' estimates and quotes, from a number of local contractors, for a fencing project. This was no mean feat given the rather specialist nature of the project and a number of general fencing

contractors were simply unable or unwilling to work on such a challenging site – where access for heavy machinery is clearly an issue. Nonetheless, a project and costings were finally agreed and an application for funding by the Lancashire Environmental Fund (LEF) was prepared and submitted.



Some of the current fencing along the public footpath.

We are delighted to report that, at their recent funding round meeting, the LEF awarded the Trust a grant of £11,000 as part-funding for our fencing project. This is fantastic news and we are enormously grateful to the LEF for their continued support. The funding is all the more impressive given the large number of projects submitted in this round of applications (there was a significant 'post-covid bulge' in application numbers) and uncertainty about LEF's future funding levels (a consequence of ever diminishing land-fill activities).

Overall, the fencing project has been costed at some £15,000, so the award of £11,000 certainly meets the lion's share of the project costs. Indeed, it effectively represents the maximum the LEF could have awarded under their funding rules for a project of this size.

We anticipate that the fencing project work will take place during the coming autumn months. The work will be undertaken by McKay and Simpson (Southport.). They are specialist contractors with a long history of work on local nature reserves and were responsible for installation of our own viewing screens and other work on our footpath and access points.

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The most challenging aspect of the work will be the removal of the current fencing – and some of the vegetation in close proximity to it. Some of you will, no doubt, have noticed that several trees have actually grown around and into the fencing in places! Once the old fencing is removed, installation of the new fencing should be quite straightforward. The work will necessitate closing the footpath for a period of time – probably approximately 2 weeks – although this is clearly weather etc. dependent. Visitors will be kept informed about the status of the footpath by regular updates on our Facebook page, so do check there before planning a visit to the Wetland



The steps from the ginnel onto the Wetlands.

A number of other improvements will also be carried out under this project. A handrail will be installed along the steps leading from the ginnel onto the Wetlands. Given how difficult these steps can be, particularly in icy conditions, this is something that has been widely requested. In addition, a new gate will be created onto the Fen embankment. This will provide easier access for volunteers and their equipments (including mowers etc.) when working on the Fen embankments. Finally, short lengths of safety fencing will be erected around some particularly hazardous areas on the Mere embankments.

Tern Raft Update

You will recall that, in spring, we launched a new and ‘improved’ tern raft on the Mere. In the

days following its positioning, the raft certainly came to the attention of both Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls. In the end, it was the Black-headed Gulls that chose to nest on the rafts (both old and new) whereas the terns looked elsewhere for nesting opportunities. It is, of course, disappointing that we did not get to see any nesting terns this year. However, given that Black-headed Gulls are an ‘amber-listed’ species (a species with an ‘unfavourable’ conservation status in Europe), we should be pleased with their nesting success.



A pair of Common Tern inspecting our new raft in early May (photograph by Mark Breaks).

It is perhaps inevitable that gulls chose to nest on the rafts. This is certainly something that is commonly seen at other sites where rafts are in use. After all, gulls and terns commonly nest in close proximity on shingle beaches. One advantage of our new tern raft is that it can relatively easily be moved to the shore and covered over during the winter months. It can then be re-deployed in time for the arrival of terns in spring thereby increasing the chances of them taking advantage of nesting opportunities on the raft.

Summer Bug Hunt

As you may know, in the past, we have organised a summer butterfly walk on the Wetlands. Given the on-going decline in butterfly numbers, as outlined earlier in this newsletter, we thought that, this year, we would expand our horizons and look more generally at

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insect-life on the Wetlands. We therefore arranged a bug hunt on Saturday 17th August.



Visitors and trustees ready to start their Wetlands Bug Hunt.

We were really fortunate that, on the afternoon, the sun shone and it was warm and dry when a group of over 30 enthusiastic visitors and trustees took to the embankments in search of Wetlands bug-life. As always, patience was the key, and just spending a few minutes standing still on the embankments revealed a plethora of insect life all around. From grasshoppers leaping around the undergrowth, hoverflies and bees busy around the wildflowers to dragonflies patrolling the embankments there was lots to see. Perhaps the highlights of the afternoon were the discovery of a superb Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar and finding a magnificent Brown Hawker dragonfly resting on the hedgerow along the public footpath.

As for butterflies, as perhaps anticipated, we did find only small numbers. These were mainly seen on some of the buddleia bushes. The best count was of a small group of 5 Peacocks and 1 Red Admiral on a buddleia bush in an ideal, sheltered 'sun-trap' location.

Andy Rowett

It was with great sadness that we recently learned of the untimely passing of Andy Rowett. Until his recent retirement, Andy had been the Fund Manager for the Lancashire Environmental Fund. Right from the outset, Andy was a tremendous, and very vocal,

supporter of the Wetlands. In addition to grasping the potential of the site, at the time when the Trust was newly formed, he also fully appreciated the importance of the community-based nature of the project.



Andy Rowett (left) visiting the Wetlands with trustee Geoff Carefoot.

Andy was always extremely supportive of our grant applications, to the LEF, for projects aimed at improving the accessibility of the site (footpath restoration, ramp and viewing screen installations etc.) and was a regular visitor. Without that initial funding success with LEF, the Wetlands would not be what it is today and public access to the site would still be severely limited. Andy was a loyal friend to Grimsargh Wetlands and we will miss him. Our sympathy goes to his family, friends and colleagues at LEF.

Volunteer Days



Volunteers ready to start work on the Wetlands.

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Our proposed autumn work schedule is as follows: *Farmers' Market Stall*

Saturday 21st September
Sunday 6th October
Saturday 19th October
Sunday 3rd November
Saturday 16th November
Sunday 1st December

Work sessions start at 10 o'clock, when we meet at the Compound. Generally, we work until about 2 pm in the afternoon; however, people are free to leave as and when they wish. As always, we ask everyone to book onto the volunteer days using our online booking system (<https://www.grimsarghwetlands.org/events/volunteer-days.php>). 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.

To give a flavour of the sort of tasks that are likely to be undertaken in the coming sessions, trustee Geoff Carefoot commented:

'Amongst the things we are hoping to do during the off-season (September to March, inclusive) is a more nuanced mowing programme to create more of a mosaic of grass embankments to encourage different flora and insects, more permanent dams between the Island Lake and the Fen and between the Island Lake and the Mere to help maintain a damper environment in the Fen and a higher retained water level in the Mere, respectively. We also hope to provide some basic seating to the rear of the main Compound screens and just off the public footpath.'

All this is extra to our usual, annual winter maintenance regime for which we are unable to bid for grants and is the charity's main expense and something we couldn't do without the hard work of our valued volunteers.'



The Farmers' Market stall in May (photograph by Jayne Woollam).

You may recall that we held a very successful stall at the Grimsargh Farmer's Market event in May. We were delighted to raise £140.00 from the sale of bird nest boxes, feeders and food and we are tremendously grateful to Lindsay Simons, "Animal Crackers", for donating items for the stall. We also sold packs of our new Wetlands greetings cards that feature a stunning aerial view of the Wetlands, courtesy of local photographer, Mark Ashmore.

Following on from this success, we will have a stall at the Grimsargh Farmers' Market on Saturday 21st September. We will again be selling a selection of garden bird feeders and food, courtesy of Animal Crackers. However, the key thing to note is that we anticipate revealing our 'fresh from the printers' 2025 Wetlands calendar. Relatively limited numbers of the calendar will be printed and we would encourage anyone who wants to purchase copies of the calendar (£6 each) to do so at the September Farmers' Market. This year, there will be no re-printing of calendars – so when this batch gone - that's it! We will, of course, also be selling packs of our bespoke Wetlands

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greeting cards – again these are a limited edition only available from our stall.

We do look forward to seeing you at the Farmers' Market. Do remember that all funds raised go to Grimsargh Wetlands Trust for the upkeep and maintenance of the Wetlands. The cost of insuring and maintaining the Wetlands increases every year. These costs are not met by external grants (that specifically exclude support for help with insurance or routine maintenance costs) and we therefore rely on your donations, membership subscriptions and stall sale to cover these costs.

Legacy Planning

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. Relentless urbanisation makes the Wetlands an even more precious haven for both wildlife and members of the local community. The work of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust is crucial in ensuring that this wonderful community asset remains for years to come. 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. We're always incredibly grateful to receive donations large or small. Thank you.

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.

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 Mark Breaks 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

