

Grimسargh Wetlands Newsletter



Winter 2024

Welcome

Welcome to your Winter newsletter. Many of you will undoubtedly have seen recent announcements, by some of our best know wildlife charities, about the difficulty of operating in the current financial climate. The RSPB has announced cuts that may well see the closure of some of their reserves and facilities. Indeed, the RSPB Visitor Centre at Fairhaven, Lytham is ear-marked for closure in the New Year. Smaller charities, such as Butterfly Conservation, have warned members and supporters of the need for major cuts in their planned work and projects aimed, in this case, at supporting the rapidly declining UK butterfly population. A major factor in decisions made by these, and other conservation charities, is the predicted impact of the recently announced increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions.

Grimسargh Wetlands Trust does not have any paid employees; however, we are certainly not immune to ever rising costs and reduced income. Recently, we have been lucky to receive some significant external grant funding; however, such funding inevitably comes with the requirement to provide matching funding from ourselves. In this context, we would very much like to thank all our volunteers and supporters for their continued hard work and generosity throughout the past year. Simply put, without their support and hard work, Grimسargh Wetlands would be lost to the local community.

We wish you all seasonal best wishes.

The Trustees

Avian Influenza ('bird flu') Update

With the recent report of the first outbreak of avian influenza in a poultry flock (East Yorkshire), since February, it is worthwhile reiterating the need for vigilance when out in the countryside – as highlighted in the poster (below) provided by Defra.



This current outbreak is of particular concern as it appears that the variant of virus involved (HPAI H5N5) has, in previous years, been confined to cases of avian influenza in marine birds. However, it now looks like HPAI H5N5 is shifting inland into terrestrial avian species. As a consequence, the wild bird risk in Great Britain is considered to be high with further instances of HPAI H5N5 expected to emerge from continental Europe in the coming weeks.

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Many of us maintain garden bird feeders during the winter months. If you feed wild birds in your garden, please keep feeders and water baths clean as advised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO):

<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/feeding-garden-birds>

This will help to stop avian influenza and other diseases spreading between birds. Finally, always thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water after handling feeders etc.

Lancashire Environmental Fund Annual Event 2024



Trustees Jayne Woollam and Geoff Carefoot with LEF Fund Manager Elizabeth Morgan (right), at the Fund's recent annual event at Barton Village Hall (photograph courtesy of LEF).

Trustees were invited to send representatives to the Lancashire Environmental Fund's Annual Event that was recently held at Barton Village Hall. Attendees were able to learn all about the various projects that have been funded, across Lancashire, during the last year. In addition,

Fund Manager, Elizabeth Morgan, spoke about future funding opportunities for projects that fit the LEF's strategies that "involve sustainable development and community action, have environmental benefit, allow public access and offer good value for money." On a less positive note, there is some uncertainty about LEF's future funding capability (a consequence of ever diminishing land-fill activities as the emphasis changes to maximising recycling) meaning that competition for increasingly limited funds will continue to increase.

Trustee Jayne Woollam, who attended the event, commented: "The LEF has supported Grimsargh Wetlands Trust since its inception in 2017, funding, or part-funding, pathways, fencing, screens and ramps. Without this ongoing support from the LEF, Grimsargh Wetlands Trust could not have completed many of the projects on the site. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the LEF, and in particular to Andy Rowett, former LEF Fund Manager, who loyally supported Grimsargh Wetlands Trust over many years and who tragically died earlier this year."

Visit by Alston Lane Primary School

In early September, we were delighted to welcome Year 3 children from Alston Lane Primary School for a morning on the Wetlands. Trustee, Geoff Carefoot led the children and their teachers on a 'jungle trek', the highlight of which was the sighting of a family of Roe Deer on the old railway embankment that runs alongside the Mere. Butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers and frog(lets) were also among the wildlife found by the children during their adventure. Of course, there were plenty of ducks and geese to be seen along with a hunting sparrowhawk and a heron fishing in the shallows of the Island Lake.

Miss Kerrigan, the class teacher, said that the children had really enjoyed the visit and would be busily making posters about the Wetlands wildlife, once back in their classroom.



Trustees Jayne Woollam and Geoff Carefoot with the Year 3 children (photograph courtesy of Alston Lane Primary School).

Goosnargh and Whittingham WI Meeting



The Wetlands presentation at the Goosnargh and Whittingham WI meeting (photograph courtesy of Goosnargh and Whittingham WI).

The Trust was invited to give a presentation on their work at a recent meeting of the Goosnargh and Whittingham WI. The presentation covered the inception of the Trust, the wonderful range of fauna and flora a visitor is likely to see on the Wetlands and our ongoing conservation work. Following the presentation, there were plenty of enthusiastic questions and, this being a WI

meeting, there were delicious home-made cakes to round off the evening.

We would like to thank all those who attended, and we are tremendously grateful for the generous donation made, on the night, to Grimsargh Wetlands Trust.

Autumnal Avian Highlights

Spotted Redshank - We were delighted that a bird, previously unrecorded on the Wetlands, was seen during the early autumn. Geoff Carefoot has provided the following account of the unexpected visitor:

“In mid-September, during migration season, we started to drop the water level in the Island Lake to expose more mud in order to attract passing waders. It worked! On Saturday morning, 14th September a scarce, migrating Spotted Redshank dropped in on passage from Arctic Scandinavia to Africa. It spent the day avidly feeding in the shallows but departed south overnight.

The Spotted Redshank is a more elegant, slimmer and longer-legged version of our regular, local Redshanks which are resident in Lancashire, mainly on the coast, and especially in winter.



Spotted Redshank (foreground) and Common Redshank (background) (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

The photograph (taken elsewhere), which shows a non-breeding plumaged Spotted Redshank in front of a Common Redshank demonstrates some of the key identification features such as

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the more speckled wing feathers. Diagnostically, the much more obvious pale fore-supercilium (area between the eye and bill), the much finer and longer bill - with a subtle 'droop' at the end and the fact that the bill is only red at the base of the lower mandible are key features.

Amongst large flocks of Redshank, the Spotted Redshank is easily overlooked when in its post-breeding plumage! Its English name belies the fact that when seen in breeding plumage on the Arctic tundra the bird is completely sooty black, with long black legs and bill.

Occasionally, returning breeding birds passing through Lancashire show some residual black plumage but the majority of birds seen seem to pass down the coast. Birds east of the M6 are very scarce with only one such bird being identified in the previous 3 years.

The visit of this rare migrant reinforces the importance of Grimsargh Wetlands as a stop-over for feeding and resting migrating wading birds on passage from their northern breeding grounds to their winter quarters. In an area of housing development and agricultural monoculture, small wetlands, like ours, are truly oases for vulnerable birds."

Other Highlights – Another wading bird that put in a very welcome appearance on the Wetlands was the Green Sandpiper. A group of up to 4 Green Sandpiper was often recorded on the Island Lake during October – no doubt taking a break during their autumn migration from Scandinavia to African wintering grounds. This wader gives every impression of having a 'nervous disposition', frequently bobbing up and down when standing, making a thin repeated whistle and readily taking to the air with a low zig-zagging flight.

Some impressive counts of Snipe were recorded on the Wetlands during the autumn – with over 40 birds found on one occasion. Given just how well these birds are camouflaged, this may well be something of an under-estimate; nonetheless,

it does highlight the patience and persistence of the recorder in trying to distinguish birds from autumnal grasses and reeds!

As ever, there were large numbers of gulls on site. A notable record was that of a colour-ringed Black-headed Gull (among a group of around 100 gulls). Some research by regular visitor and recorder, Mark Breaks, revealed that the bird had been ringed, as a chick, at Martin Mere in 2021. There were also a couple of ringed cormorants among the, larger than usual (up to 36), group on the Mere. One of which was, again thanks to Mark's diligent work, identified as having been ringed in Germany and recently sighted in Derbyshire before being recorded on the Wetlands.

Away from the water, a Yellow-browed Warbler was recorded in the Fen. Historically, a scarce autumn visitor to the UK, numbers of this charming little warbler appear to have increased significantly in recent years.

Finally, a bird to look (or perhaps more likely, listen) out for in the coming weeks is the secretive Water Rail. It is most likely to be given away by its 'piglet squeal' alarm call. The Fen (especially where water-logged) is an absolutely ideal habitat for these birds and individuals have been recorded here on several occasions during the recent weeks.

Contractors on Site

Our regular contractors, Wilkinson Landscaping (www.wilkinsonlandscaping.co.uk - now based in Hutton), were working on the Wetlands for several days during early October. As always, their visits resulted in dramatic changes, with the embankments and elsewhere being given their 'autumnal haircut'. It is perhaps worth reiterating the importance of the annual scrub clearance 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

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wild flowers – particularly the Early Purple Orchids, Primroses and Wood Anemones.



Trustee Geoff Carefoot with Josh and Dylan from Wilkinson Landscaping.

In addition to clearing scrub, the contractors undertook a couple of other important tasks. In a number of carefully selected areas, around the Compound, grass was scraped away to reveal the underlying limestone chips (a relic of the time when there was a builders yard here and, before that, buildings from the time when the reservoirs supplied water to the local community). The importance of this work is that it returns the area to one much more suitable for the growth of flora that thrives in soil/nutrient-poor environments (such as Bee Orchids) that have been lost as grass has taken over and flourished.



One of the scraped areas where Bee Orchids have grown in the past.

While the contractors were working with their heavy machinery, they also took the opportunity to re-position some of the (very heavy!)

sandstone blocks that had been retrieved from the Island Lake during the island re-modelling work undertaken several years ago. These blocks have been placed in the Compound Viewing Screen area and provide some basic (but hard-wearing!) seating for visitors – something that has long been asked for.



New 'seating' by the main viewing screens.

Fencing Update

Contractors Mackay and Simpson (Southport) were also on site during the autumn in order to undertake the fencing work made possible by the recent grant funding from the LEF. This work is now complete and, of course, the most visible sign of this work is the upgraded fencing along the public footpath.

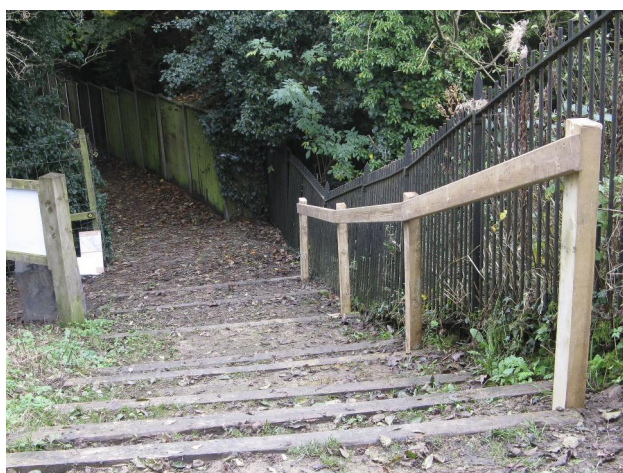


The new footpath fencing – in progress (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Regular visitors to the Wetlands will know that the footpath fencing was in desperate need of replacement and that work has now been

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completed. Although much of the old fencing was rotten and unfit for anything other than disposal, it was possible to re-claim a significant amount of timber that we will re-cycle on other projects. You will need to wait until spring to find out exactly how that material has been recycled. Needless to say, volunteers are in for some interesting project work!



The new handrail (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

In addition to the upgraded fencing, a hand-rail has been installed by the steps leading from the ginnel onto the Wetlands. This was something that has been much requested by visitors, given how difficult these steps can be, particularly in wet or icy conditions. Visitors will also notice a new gate onto the Fen embankment. This is for use by volunteers undertaking maintenance work on the embankments. The gate has been designed to allow access for mowers and other equipment – thereby considerably easing access for workers. Finally, security fencing has been installed around a particularly hazardous ‘drop-off’ area on the embankments of the Mere. This will help keep volunteers, and visitors on guided walks, safe.

We were, as ever, greatly impressed by the professionalism, hard work and competence of Andy and Gareth from Mackay and Simpson who completed the work on schedule, notwithstanding some appallingly wet weather. Their hard work ensured that closure and disruption of the public footpath was kept to a

minimum, thereby ensuring that visitors were soon able to get back onto the Wetlands.

Winter Walk

We plan to hold a ‘Winter Guided Walk’ at 10 am on Saturday 28th 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 boots will be essential!

Volunteer Days

Our proposed winter work schedule is as follows:

Sunday 5th January
Saturday 18th January
Sunday 2nd February
Saturday 15th February
Sunday 2nd March
Saturday 15th March

Work sessions start at 10 am, 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.

Corporate Volunteer Days

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?

**CHOOSE
GRIMSARGH WETLANDS**
FOR YOUR
CORPORATE AWAY DAY



✉ grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com

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

Farmers’ Market Stall and other Fund-raising Activities



Jayne and Ron Woollam promoting the Wetlands at the Grimsargh Farmers’ Market.

During the lead-up to Christmas, Jayne and Ron Woollam have overseen a Grimsargh Wetlands stall in the Village Hall as part of the monthly Farmers’ Market. They have sold Wetlands calendars together with packs of our new greetings cards that feature a stunning aerial

view of the Wetlands, courtesy of local photographer, Mark Ashmore. In addition, a variety of bird feeders, bird food and nest boxes - provided by Lindsay Simons, "Animal Crackers", have been available for purchase.

We are tremendously grateful to all the people who have purchased items from the stall. Remember, all the proceeds go directly to supporting the work of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust. We are indebted to Lindsay for her ongoing and extremely generous support of the Wetlands. We are also particularly grateful to Ron and Jayne for giving up their Saturday mornings in order to run the stall for us.



Our calendars on sale in the Grimsargh Village Store (photograph by Hannah McGivern).

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

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

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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.

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 incredibly 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 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 Groff Carefoot, Hannah McGivern, Lancashire Environmental Fund, Goosnargh and Whittingham WI and Alston Lane Primary School 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

