

Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter

Summer 2025



Welcome

No doubt, you were, like us, profoundly shocked and saddened by the recent, unexpected death of our dear friend and fellow trustee, Jayne Woollam. Right from the outset, Jayne played a key role in the organisation and running of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust. As Trust Secretary, Jayne was the driving force behind so many of the Trust's fund-raising, volunteering and other public engagement activities. In addition, Jayne led many of the Trust's successful applications for funding from external bodies, most notably a sequence of major grants from the Lancashire Environmental Fund. It is no exaggeration to say that this funding success has, over the last 8 years, transformed the site into what it is today – one of the premier local nature reserves in Lancashire.



Jayne with our Grimsargh Field Day stall.

Jayne was passionate about the Wetlands and the opportunities it offered for the local community to interact with nature. She was also very much aware of how the continued success of the Wetlands was crucially dependent upon the full engagement of the local community.

Right from the start, Jayne was clear that Grimsargh Wetlands was a community-driven project. Importantly, Jayne appreciated, that the Wetlands could not be taken for granted and that, without the continued active support and participation of the local community, the Wetlands, as we know it today, could so easily be lost.

This newsletter, of course, contains tributes to Jayne. Notwithstanding this sad news, plenty has been happening on the Wetlands over recent weeks and you can read about it all in this newsletter.

The Trustees

Spring Volunteer Work Sessions



The Sand Martin nesting bank taking shape on the embankment of the Island Lake.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the major project work undertaken over the winter and spring months involved the construction and erection of a Sand Martin nesting bank. Trustee Geoff Carefoot has previously described the construction, from recycled materials, of the nesting bank components and,

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in our early March volunteer sessions, the nesting bank was erected on the embankment of the Island Lake. The Nesting bank contains 20 nest boxes – accessed via sand/mud filled tubes that the birds will need to ‘excavate’ in order to use the nest boxes. This, of course, closely mimics the way the birds make their nests in sand banks and cliffs, typically along rivers or other water bodies.

At the time of writing (early May) there are encouraging signs that birds have tried excavating several of these tubes. It will take time (perhaps several seasons) for the birds to become fully accustomed to the newly erected nesting bank. However, as any of you who have watched the, now well established, nesting bank at Brockholes will know, our nesting bank could well become a real hive of activity during the nesting season.



The finished nesting bank.

Undertaking this project has illustrated the wide range of skills and experience that we need to call on from our volunteers. These include everything from excavating the embankment stonework for the erection of a supporting platform, construction of the many components of the nest bank to the electronic skills required to install a ‘caller’ to encourage investigation and occupation of the nesting bank by the birds.

We are grateful to all who contributed their time and skills to this project. In particular, trustee Geoff Carefoot who led the project from the outset and volunteer Steve Lunt who spent,

many hours on the embankment assembling the nest bank with Geoff. Finally, it is worth reiterating that our ‘do-it-yourself’ approach, using recycled materials, has saved the Trust a great deal of money. Commercially available nesting banks, of a similar size, being prohibitively expensive.



Exposing stonework on one of the spillways.

In addition to work on the nesting bank, a great deal of essential maintenance work was also carried out during the spring months. We were lucky, this year, in that we lost no sessions to bad weather so we were able to make considerable progress with the removal of willow and scrub from embankments. This is, of course, a never ending task that needs to be repeated each year. The key is to keep on top of the clearance work and, in this respect, there is no substitute for as many ‘helping hands’ as possible.

Another task that requires on-going attention is the removal of vegetation from the stonework of the various spillways and channels interconnecting the different water bodies. This is tough and fiddly work and we are particularly grateful to those volunteers who spent their time attending to this task rather than some of the more ‘glamorous’ areas of work.

A somewhat problematic area of spring maintenance relates to the tern rafts we have on the Mere. Early in spring, maintenance was carried out on the rafts (removing vegetation, cleaning and repairing nest trays, upgrading anchor points and flotation drums etc.).

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Tern raft maintenance on the Mere.

A special thanks goes to Ian Milnes who, as in the past, brought along his outboard motor for the day, thereby saving volunteers, unaccustomed to long periods of hard rowing(!), from aching backs and sore limbs. However, no sooner had the work been completed, than the rafts all became occupied by large numbers of early nesting black-headed gulls leaving little opportunity for the late spring arrival and nesting of terns. While this is not unusual (gulls and terns naturally nest in close proximity anyway) and is certainly not a problem unique to Grimsargh (as anyone who has spent time watching the rafts at Condor Pool will have seen) it is, nonetheless, frustrating.

Fen Access Point and Viewing Screen



Volunteers working on the ramp leading to the Fen viewing screen.

An area of the Wetlands that may appear to have been neglected over the last couple of years is the Fen access point and viewing screen

area. In fact, this was not a case of neglect. It was more a realisation that, while there was a very busy construction site/housing development on the immediately adjacent land, there was little chance of attracting wildlife to that area. Now that the building work is finished and the housing development is complete, the area is again quiet and we have re-focussed our attention there.

As you may remember, the viewing area looks onto a woodland clearing with bird feeding stations and a small aquatic life pond that, given its partially shaded location, does appear to be relatively resistant to drying out. Something that would, of course, be fatal to the aquatic life we are trying to encourage.



Eyelash Pixi Cup fungi on the Fen.

Just to emphasize how the area has retained moisture this spring, one of the driest on record, clusters of small Eyelash Pixi Cup fungi were recently found thriving around the pond. This tiny fungus is characterised by its bright red, 'cups' fringed with fine, dark hairs that resemble eyelashes and is very much at home in damp areas rich in rotting wood.

The Fen viewing screen area is well worth a visit. The woodland clearing offers the opportunity to see wildlife unlikely to be seen

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elsewhere on the Wetlands. For example, there is every chance of the patient visitor catching a glimpse of the notoriously shy Woodcock known to live in the Fen.

Spring Avian Highlights.

Mediterranean Gulls

Spring is a busy time for the Wetlands birdlife. Regular readers will know that along with the large numbers of Black-headed Gulls attracted to the site during the early months of spring, there are numbers of Mediterranean Gulls. You will recall that, last year, we were delighted that up to 37 individuals were reported on the Island Lake (as recorded on the East Lancashire Ornithologists Club (ELOC) recording site on 24th March, 2024).

This year, the counts of Mediterranean Gulls reached, frankly, amazing levels with 82 birds reported at Grimsargh on 25th March 2025 (as recorded on the ELOC site). Given that, only a few years ago, we counted ourselves very fortunate to see just a dozen or so of these birds on the Island Lake, this represents a remarkable year on year increase in numbers. No doubt, this reflects the continued spread of the species, north and west, since first reported breeding in the UK in the 1960s.

Of particular interest was a ringed Mediterranean Gull seen on the Wetlands. Fortunately, colleagues at WWT Martin Mere were able to read the ring 'White 3AAX' and learn something of the history of that particular bird. In summary, the bird was ringed in June 2020: near Copenhagen, Denmark, it was next seen in 2021 in Wales and then during 2022 in Cornwall and Devon before being next seen at Grimsargh, for the first time, in May 2024 and now again in March 2025.

Curlew and Whimbrel Roosts

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the spring Curlew roost on the Wetlands was steadily building in February with the expectation that

the roost would peak in early March, before the birds moved on to their summer breeding sites (the Bowland Fells). In fact, this year, the roost appeared to peak a little earlier with over 500 birds reported roosting here on 28th February (as recorded on the ELOC recording website). Although up to 400 birds were still reported to be roosting here in early March, as expected, numbers rapidly fell away with fewer than 10 birds regularly recorded during the last two weeks of March. Special thanks go to local birder, and volunteer, Mark Breaks and trustee Geoff Carefoot for their diligent recording of the Wetlands roost.

Just as the numbers of Curlew roosting on the Wetlands diminished, the numbers of the, rather similar looking, Whimbrel began to increase. Trustee Geoff Carefoot, who takes part in the annual, Lancashire-wide Whimbrel 'census' explains:

"Whimbrels are a member of the Curlew family, all of which are suffering considerable reductions in numbers due to low breeding success, some, such as the Slender-billed curlew, to the point of extinction. Whimbrel are slightly smaller than our resident upland curlews, and have a subtly different call.

Lancashire has a northbound passage of Whimbrels during the last week of April and the first week of May when they (about 300 pairs) pass through from their wintering quarters on the west African coast to their breeding grounds in our Northern Isles, The Faeroes, Iceland and east Greenland. The southbound passage in late summer is much less noticeable.

These birds generally move up the coastal areas where they feed on mudflats and roost on secure sites such as salt marshes or just inland where they feed on terrestrial invertebrates in fields and roost on safe areas such as reservoir causeways and islands, etc.

It takes a couple of weeks for the small flocks to pass through and for a number of years now birders across west Lancashire count the birds

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coming in to roost at all their known roosting sites on a couple of specific dates.



Whimbrel coming in to roost at dusk (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Grimsargh Wetlands and Alston Wetland at Longridge are probably the most easterly Lancashire sites in regular use. This year's counts, at Grimsargh, produced 47 roosting birds on April 24th and 98 birds on May 2nd, modest numbers from a total of 1081 on the first count and 1576 on the second.

As usual, the undisturbed but well-monitored, Barnacre Reservoirs at Oakenclough scored the highest tallies with 444 followed by 589 but the counts show the importance of these 'wetlands', usually man-made structures like reservoirs and nature reserves, to compensate for lost, drained, natural wetlands essential to migratory wading birds."

Avocets and Oystercatchers

You may remember that, last year, we were delighted with the nesting success of a pair of Avocet. This year, up to three pairs of Avocet have been regularly observed on the Island Lake. Although, at the time of writing, at least one pair has attempted nesting, that attempt appears to have failed due to predation.

In addition, up to four pairs of Oystercatcher have been seen on site this spring. At least one pair has attempted nesting – so fingers crossed for a successful outcome. In each case, our

assumption is that the nesting birds are ones that have previously nested with us.



Avocet feeding in the shallows of the Island Lake (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

The glorious spring weather has afforded some excellent opportunities for photographers to take some stunning portraits of both these charismatic wader species.



Oystercatcher on the Wetlands (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Visit by 1st Grimsargh Beavers

In early April, a group from the 1st Grimsargh Beavers visited the Wetlands for an evening exploration of the Wetlands. The group was guided around the site by trustee Geoff Carefoot and others. The Beavers learned about the history of the site and the role of the former reservoirs in ensuring water supplies for the local community and local industry.

Of course it was the variety of wildlife on show that the Beavers were most interested in. They

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heard Chifchaff singing, watched the diminutive Little Ringed Plover on the exposed mud of the Island Lake and watched as a group of Curlew came into roost.



The Beavers watching the birdlife on the Island Lake
(photograph by Hannah McGivern).

They were fascinated to hear about the ‘bat cave’ – abandoned pipework that is now home to numerous bats. They also picked up tips on wildflower identification and were soon spotting primroses and lesser celandine on the embankments.

We hope they enjoyed their visit (and were not too cold in the chilly breeze around dusk!). We look forward to welcoming them back again soon.

Tributes to Jayne Woollam

Trust Treasurer, Lesley Walker has provided the following heart-felt tribute to Jayne:

“Our Trustees and local community have been recently shocked and saddened by the sudden loss of our dear friend and colleague Jayne Woollam, who passed away peacefully after a short illness on Thursday 10th April 2025, surrounded by her family.

From the outset Jayne, was the organiser, co-ordinator and Secretary for our Trust and members. Her laughter and ‘oh Jayne!’ moments will be very much missed by us all; but

we’ll smile so very often when thinking about what she would have said or done in situations we find ourselves in.



Jayne showing young visitors around the
Wetlands.

As Secretary, she was involved in setting up our constitution and organising the day-to-day running of the charity, including our fundraising events, volunteer days and guided walks.

Jayne was passionate about the outdoors and about ensuring that the local community benefits from our little oasis of wildlife here in Grimsargh. Her enthusiasm and drive for our cause was infectious, we’ll endeavour to continue to uphold this vibe and continue her good work moving forwards.

Jayne, we’ll miss you but will keep you in our hearts and strive to preserve the Wetlands for future generations.”

Former Chair of Grimsargh Parish Council, Lindsay Philipson also remembers Jayne:

“When the Parish Council finalised the transfer of The Wetlands from United Utilities in 2017, it was imperative that we quickly established The Wetlands Trust to manage a very complex site. When Jayne was suggested as Secretary we were delighted; and she quickly established herself as very capable and thorough in that role, documenting the Trust meetings in great depth. Aside from that she took on many other

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responsibilities - organising and attending Volunteer days and Nature walks, preparing funding bids, and early social media promotions.

Later on Jayne also became a valued member of Grimsargh Parish Council and demonstrated the same level of commitment to our village - she was always to be relied upon to get the job done and never stinted with her time.

On a more personal note, I count myself very lucky to have had Jayne as a friend. In 2020 just as the pandemic was ending we established a reading group together; we had a shared love of English and of books. Our first meeting was held at her home and we were only allowed 6 people together in a room - what awful days those were. Here I saw another side to Jayne - as well as thorough in her assessment of our books (that was the teacher in her) she was funny, often irreverent, always kind and extremely generous. And loved a glass of prosecco!

To be universally loved and respected as Jayne was is a wonderful way to be remembered."



Lindsay, Eileen and Jayne at the Wetlands Open Day in 2021.

Former Grimsargh Parish Councillor, Eileen Murray who, along with others, played such an important role in securing the future of the Wetlands site, recalls:

"I was lucky enough to first meet Jayne not that long after I had moved in to Grimsargh - when I

first got involved with Field Day. Her enthusiasm for everything was infectious.

Fast forward a good number of years to when the Parish Council had secured the site that was to become Grimsargh Wetlands, we were looking for trustees to take on the task of running it. One of the most crucial roles, we knew, would be that of Secretary. David Hindle came along to one of the meetings and declared, with delight, that he had found a secretary - "My sister, Jayne". I'll be honest, I thought "Blimey - are there no limits to what Jayne will throw herself in to?!" It wasn't like she had nothing else to do..... how would she find the time, I wondered. But throw herself in she did - quickly taking on minuting all the trustees meetings, learning all that was involved in running a charity, and working alongside myself and Paul (then treasurer), to get the Trust through the Charity Commission process and fully established. And so she continued - developing new skills in grant applications and always finding the time or making the time and demonstrating a love of and remarkable dedication to Grimsargh Wetlands.

While many, myself included, might tire of some of our voluntary responsibilities - never so with Jayne. She steadfastly carried on, even taking on further roles, indefatigable and a shining example to us all. What will we do without her?"

Volunteer Days

Our proposed work schedule is as follows:

Sunday 1st June
Saturday 21st June
Sunday 6th July
Saturday 19th July
Sunday 3rd August
Saturday 16th August

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

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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.

Grimsargh Field Day

The Trust will have a stall at Grimsargh Field Day on Saturday 28th June. As always, volunteers are more than welcome to come along and help out with our stall. The event represents a wonderful opportunity for anyone to find out more about the Wetlands and the work of Grimsargh Wetlands Trust. So, if you are there, do come along and say hello.

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 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 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 us by email at grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com. Remember, it is now possible to pay your subscriptions using *Paypal*.

Acknowledgements

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LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

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