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# Grimsargh Wetlands Newsletter



## Autumn 2025

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### Welcome

Welcome to your Autumn Newsletter. As we head into Autumn, it is heartening to be able to reflect on what appears to have been a relatively successful summer for butterflies. Certainly, compared with recent years, the anecdotal evidence is that, both nationally and locally, there have been many more butterflies about. This, no doubt, reflects the weather this year with some of the driest spring months on record followed by a sequence of summer 'heatwaves' with only a little rain otherwise. These conditions have allowed insect life to flourish – in complete contrast to last year when the cold and wet spring led to a dearth of insect life. Hopefully, the abundance of insects this year bodes well for increased fledging success for the Wetlands bird population. Of course, one good year does not change the stark reality of the long-term decline of butterfly and other insect populations but it certainly helps lift our morale.

Our volunteer work sessions have continued over the summer months – albeit in low-key fashion. Primarily, we've been keeping the footpaths and viewing areas clear and tending to saplings in our orchard and elsewhere on site. Autumn marks the launch of our main work programme and, as always, the success of that programme depends upon people participating. We urge all of you to think about attending at least one of our work sessions and we look forward to seeing you at Grimsargh Wetlands during the coming weeks.

The Trustees

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### Grimsargh Field Day



The Field Day stall.

Grimsargh Field Day took place, in glorious sunny weather, on Saturday 28th June. Of course, this year's event had added poignancy for us, and many others, given the key role that our late friend and colleague, Jayne Woollam played in Field Days and so many other facets of village life. It was touching that so many people took part in the minute of clapping in memory of her and all that she did for the village.

We are tremendously grateful to all of you who stopped by the stall to say hello and find out more about Grimsargh Wetlands. As always, it was a great opportunity to talk about the history of the site and our work maintaining and developing the reserve. We welcomed your generous donations and were able to encourage new volunteers to help us continue caring for this vital community asset.

It remains true to say that the most frequent comment we hear at Field Day is "we never knew we had a local nature reserve in the village!". Given the number of new homes and

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people new to the village, and the surrounding area, this should perhaps come as no surprise. It does illustrate the importance of running a stall at community events, such as the Field Day. This helps people find out more about the site and therefore make the most of the opportunities it provides to engage with nature.

A big thank-you goes to volunteers Dominic and Jane who spent the day on the stall, along with trustee Geoff Carefoot and others. Their help throughout the day was invaluable. As always, it was the assembly and dismantling of the gazebo that was the most taxing element of the event. However, we're pleased to report that our new gazebo proved to be much more user-friendly and a lot easier, than our previous one, for 'frazzled minds' to deal with at the end of a busy day!

### *Summer Avian Observations on the Wetlands*

Summer is often regarded as a quiet time for birdlife. To some extent this simply reflects the fact that, with vegetation 'rampant', many of the birds that were relatively easy to pick out in the bare trees of the early spring months are now rather well hidden.

It is worth reflecting on the success, or otherwise, of the spring and early summer nesting season. In all honesty, nesting success remains disappointing, especially for the waders using the Island Lake. As reported in our last newsletter, there were up to three pairs of avocet on-site and at least two pairs made nesting attempts. Unfortunately, these attempts failed through a combinations of predation and fluctuating water levels (a consequence of the very dry spring months being followed by just a few days of heavy rain). Similarly, the oystercatcher nesting attempts appeared to fail. On a more positive note, it does appear that at least one pair of lapwing was successful.

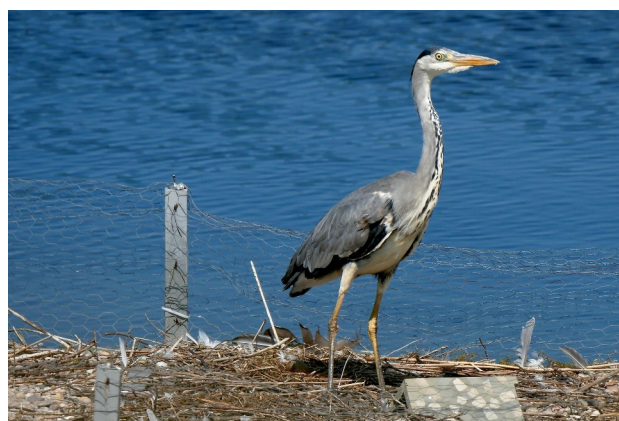
At the time of writing, coot and moorhen have regularly been seen with offspring, although the young do remain vulnerable to predation. Disappointingly, the great crested grebe pair

that looked to be making a nesting attempt on the far side of the Mere appeared to give up and move on to another site. In contrast, there is an intriguing story regarding the nesting of a pair of little grebe on the Mere.



The little grebe nest (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

Grebe nests generally consist of little more than a floating collection of aquatic weed and twigs. Perversely, this pair attempted to build a nest on top of a buoy anchored out in the middle of the Mere! Inevitably, their initial attempts failed; however, their persistence paid off and a nest, just adjacent to the buoy, appears to have been successful with at least one egg hatching. At the time of writing, the growing chick is still present.



Grey heron on one of the tern-rafts (photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

We have a number of tern-rafts on the Mere. These have proved to be very popular with gulls but, frustratingly, no signs of any terns were reported this year. With all the nesting trays already occupied by gulls, any terns arriving in

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the early weeks of summer never really had a chance.

Notwithstanding the number of gulls that nested on the rafts, there was little sign of nesting success. Indeed, although not ‘caught in the act’, a grey heron is suspected of making short work of eggs and chicks on the raft closest to the main viewing screens.

In the early spring, we installed a sand martin nesting bank on the embankment of the Island Lake. Although there were apparently no successful nesting attempts this year, there were encouraging signs of ‘investigation’. The sand in some of the tubes was disturbed with indications of attempted excavation. We are not at all disheartened by the lack of nesting here. Sand martins are known to be very faithful to historic nesting sites. As a consequence, it may well take several years for them to engage with our new nesting bank. However, once they start using the nesting bank, we can expect them to become a permanent feature – as has happened with the nesting banks at Brockholes.

Aside from nesting activity, there are several reports of interesting avian summer visitors. In early July, a group of black-tailed godwit, most in summer plumage, spent a few days on the Island Lake. A green sandpiper was also reported and stayed until the unseasonal storm of early August (Storm Floris). A pair of mandarin ducks was also seen on the Mere during July. A native of Asia, the mandarin duck was originally introduced to the UK from China. They have become established following (inevitable) escapes from captivity. Although now found across England they are rarely seen on the Wetlands.

### *Recording Wildlife Observations on the Wetlands*

All the bird sightings described in the above section were recorded on the ELOC recording site (<https://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk/>). We have always encouraged people to submit their observations to this site and, as a consequence

of the dedication of our local recorders (particularly, Geoff Carefoot, David Hindle and Mark Breaks), there is a wealth of invaluable information about the bird-life of the Wetlands now included in national databases.

The obvious question is – what about non-avian wildlife? How can that information be recorded? This is particularly important in the context of the concerns about butterfly populations. Unless species (and numbers) are recorded, then the perceived increase in butterfly numbers this year will simply remain anecdotal and little will be learned about long-term changes in populations.

Of course, in the case of butterflies, there is the nationally organised Big Butterfly Count (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>) held in late July through to early August each year. However, what about recording observations outside the period of the ‘Big Count’? More generally, what about recording other, non-avian, species? Fortunately, it has never been easier to record your wildlife observations and there are several user-friendly apps to help you contribute to the national nature knowledge base.

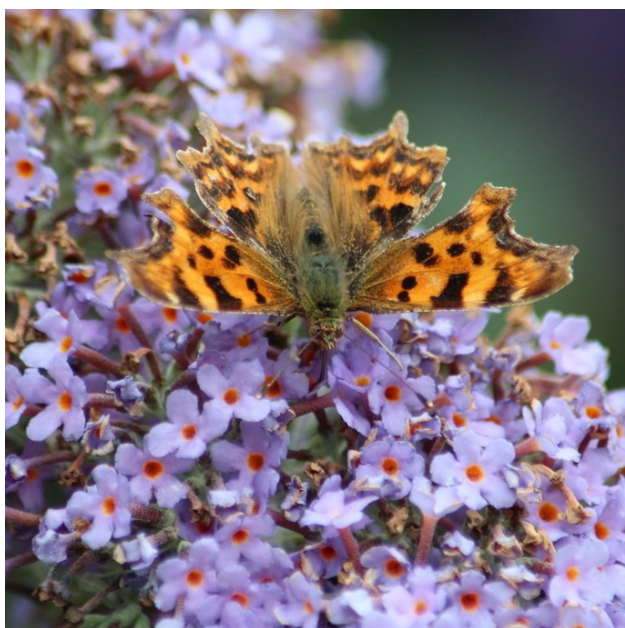
*iNaturalist* (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>) is an easy-to-use website and app. It simply requires that you take photographs of the wildlife you see, upload them to the *iNaturalist* website along with details of when and where you took the photographs (these details are recorded automatically when using the phone app), and you’ll be provided with suggested identifications based on automated image recognition. Once a sighting has been added to *iNaturalist* it is available for review by other (human!) users of *iNaturalist*, who can confirm or improve on the initial (automated) identification for you. Once a record has two or more people in agreement on its identification, it gets flagged as ‘research grade’ and can go forward for expert verification and inclusion in national recording schemes.



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The *iNaturalist* database is easy for anyone to search. For example, at the time of writing, simply searching for ‘Grimsargh Wetlands’ produces a list of 212 observations relating to 112 different species. As it happens, many of these observations were submitted by one of our own volunteers, Dominic Best, who regularly submits observations while on his walks here.



Comma butterfly on the Wetlands recorded in *iNaturalist* (photograph by Dominic Best).

A second, much more flexible, system for submission of records is the *iRecord* website (<https://irecord.org.uk/>) and phone app. This provides a quick way of entering multiple records where you are confident of the identification. These records are made directly available to a network of expert verifiers. A photograph is not required for each record, although it obviously helps verifiers if you are able to provide one.

*iNaturalist* and *iRecord* are related in that records that reach ‘research grade’ status in *iNaturalist* are imported into *iRecord* on a regular basis, so that they can be subjected to verification by experts.

It is possible to undertake very sophisticated searches of the *iRecord* database. However, at the time of writing, a simple search for records

from 2025 that contain the word ‘Grimsargh’ produces a list of 251 records (including those from *iNaturalist* that have been verified by experts).

One of these records is of particular significance. On 21st July, Gavin Thomas (one of our long-standing supporters) observed a group of small red-eyed damselflies on floating vegetation (amphibious bistort) just below the main viewing screens. The significance of this observation is that it is the first record of this species on the site.



Small red-eyed damselfly on the Mere (photograph by Gavin Thomas).

This damselfly has a particularly interesting history in the U.K. It is a migrant, first recorded in south-east England in 1999. Since then, it has rapidly expanded its range north and west, first appearing in Lancashire in 2019. Last year it was recorded in Preston for the first time (Haslam Park duckpond!) and now we have it here in Grimsargh. One of the key characteristics of this damselfly is that it is so often seen on the floating aquatic vegetation (as in the case of Gavin’s record) of still waters during the peak months of summer.

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### Nest Box Project

As you will no doubt recall, we have frequently launched initiatives aimed at increasing the opportunities for bird nesting on the Wetlands. For example, we have made 'conventional' nest boxes for installation on the site (or for sale to raise funds), we have created tern rafts complete with nest trays and we have, most recently, completed a sand martin nesting bank. Our next project, led by trustee Geoff Carefoot, involves the construction of some specialised nest boxes for specific species. Geoff Carefoot explains further:

*"Some birds require a cavity to nest in. Sometimes this is self-extracted, e.g. by woodpeckers, but many rely on older holes and cavities in trees. Unfortunately with the drive to eradicate old timber and tidy up farmland many birds are struggling to find suitable nesting cavities."*

*We are all familiar with artificial blue tit boxes and the like but many birds find the hole diameter critical. Blue tits, great tits, pied flycatchers and nuthatches need specific hole diameters to attract them otherwise they will ignore them.*

*Other birds readily take to open-fronted boxes and these can attract robins, redstarts, pied wagtails and spotted flycatchers as they aren't too critical of the size of the open frontage. Unfortunately, as the population of many of these species crash they naturally find it more difficult to locate nest boxes.*

*To make nest boxes for certain species it is vital to 'know the bird' and understand its requirements. A case in point is the little owl, common when I was a youth but now all but extinct in Lancashire due to excessive use of pesticides and herbicides. This bird needs a tunnel entrance into a larger void where the nest site remains dark. It needs an internal baffle to exclude external light. 'Off-duty' birds also like to bask in sunshine close to the nest and a shelf can be included.*



Little owl nest box (nest box and photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

*Because the nest cavity is deep and the owls and owlets produce lots of droppings and prey debris around the nest it is vital that a door access is provided to clean out the nest site in winter.*



Kestrel nest box (nest box and photograph by Geoff Carefoot).

*The kestrel nest box is larger, due to the host being larger, is open-fronted for a line-of-sight approach and has a landing perch which can be fixed left or right. Because of the larger entrance cleaning out is much easier."*

Geoff goes on to comment that constructing the correct sort of species-specific nest box is actually the easy bit – you then have to site the box correctly:



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*"It is often critical where the box is sited and fixed. The larger the box the higher up the tree it needs to be (and all boxes should be above 2m height). The prevailing wind locally is from the SW, W, and NW so boxes should be on the eastern side of trunks or buildings (SE is optimum so it doesn't receive too much heat from the south and the trunk shields it from most winds.) Boxes should be amongst vegetation if possible and it is sensible to subdue the box colour."*

*Finally, remember, grey squirrels, woodpeckers (which drill into nest boxes for nestlings), stoats, magpies, in fact most crow species, will all make short shrift of eggs or nestlings if the box is too obvious."*

If, over the coming winter months, you are interested in making your own 'small garden bird' nest-boxes the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) produce an excellent guide here:

<https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/bto-nest-boxes-essential-guide.pdf>

This guide provides detailed plans and specifications for building your own species-specific nest boxes. The BTO also provides much useful advice on positioning your newly built nest box in your garden:

<https://www.bto.org/learn/helping-birds/nest-boxes/putting-nest-box>

Geoff has been busy constructing the specialised nest boxes shown above. His job was made easier by the local availability (The Longridge Men's Shed, Warwick St., Longridge) of precision machinery for cutting and planing the wood needed for projects such as this.

These nest boxes (and others) will be sited on the Wetlands at one of the up-coming volunteer sessions.



Geoff Carefoot preparing wood for nest boxes  
(photograph courtesy of Longridge Men's Shed).

## Update on the Trust

### Vacancies for trustees

As you will appreciate, the loss of Jayne Woollam, has been extremely difficult for us. Of course, Jayne was very much a 'one off' and it is certainly difficult for us to contemplate 'replacing' her. Nonetheless, sadly, we do find ourselves in the position of looking for up to two new trustees (there was already a long-standing vacancy, before the loss of Jayne). We would therefore be delighted to hear from anyone who believes they can offer something as a trustee. It is important to emphasise that there are many skills and talents that may be invaluable to the Trust – it's not just about who can cut back the scrub on the embankments (although it sometimes feels like that!).

An appreciation of the community-based nature of the Trust is essential. Remember, we have no paid employees – everyone working on behalf

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of the Trust, be it as a trustee or volunteer, is giving up their own time and donating their own skills - be they professional or personal skills.

If you would like to find out more about acting as a trustee, do let us know of your interest (email: [grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com](mailto:grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com)).

Of course, aside from the trustee vacancies we are always looking for new volunteers. Once again, it's not just about a willingness to come along to work sessions (although 'many hands do indeed make light work'!) If you feel you have skills to offer the Trust do please let us know. For example, we are delighted to have volunteers who regularly bake cakes and other goodies for our volunteers at our work sessions. We also have, in Hannah McGivern, a volunteer who generously donates her time and professional skills to the upkeep of our website and social media – and we would be lost without her. We have other volunteers who are happy to support us at events like the Field Day – helping on the stall, walking in the parade shaking collection tubs etc.

So, if you have a skill or interest that you feel may usefully support the Trust, do let us know. Finally, if you can spend a few hours at the weekends, then do please think about coming along to one of our work sessions. We promise, no matter what your abilities are, we will make good use of them!

### **Financial update**

It is worth saying something about the finances of the Trust. As a charity, the Trust relies on donations, fund-raising activities, sponsorship and membership fees for its income. Competitively awarded grants (from organisations such as the Lancashire Environmental Fund, LEF) support specific projects; however, the routine maintenance of the site and the Trust's on-going costs are not generally eligible for grant-supported funding and therefore have to be met from donations and our own fund-raising activities.

There are two important aspects of grant income. Firstly, many grant-giving organisations expect recipients to make a financial contribution to any grant-funded project. This is usually a fixed % of the total project spend (sometimes 'like for like funding'). Very rarely do awards cover the full cost of a project. As a consequence, successful grant applications (although clearly very welcome) do usually impose a financial commitment on the part of the Trust.

Secondly, readers will know that, over the years, we have been extremely fortunate to receive a series of generous grants from the LEF. Sadly, it appears that this fund is being 'wound-down' and it is likely that no further grants will be awarded after 2026. The reasons for this are simple. The money distributed by the LEF, as grant awards, comes from a landfill tax. However, the amount of waste now sent to landfill in Lancashire has reduced to such an extent that there is now insufficient tax revenue to support the operation of the LEF.

Clearly, the elimination of so much landfill is a good thing; however, the knock-on effect is that we (along with many other environmentally-focussed charities in Lancashire) will need to look for alternative support for our project work.

As always, Treasurer to the Trust, Lesley Walker has produced a detailed breakdown of the Trust's 2024 income and expenditure and this will be presented at the up-coming AGM. However, it is possible to highlight the main features of the 2024 finances here. It is sobering to note that our most significant on-going cost is site insurance at nearly £3000 per annum. Regular maintenance by local contractors costs over £2000 per annum. Purchase and up-keep of tools and other essential equipment for volunteers is another significant expense (over £4000 in 2024 – although this included a contribution to the purchase of the new boat that was made possible by an award from the Howard and Alice Bridges Fund).

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In addition to grant-funding for specific projects, our own fund-raising and sales generated nearly £2000 in 2024. Donations, gifts and membership fees also raised nearly £2000.

The importance of income from these activities is abundantly clear from the above breakdown of the Trust's financial commitments. We are tremendously grateful to all in the local community who support us, be it through donations, sponsorship or membership fees. Without your generous support, it simply would not be possible to maintain and develop the Wetlands.

### *Volunteer Days*

Our proposed autumn work schedule is as follows:

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September  
Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September  
Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October  
Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October  
Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November  
Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November  
Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December

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 free to leave as and when they wish. As always, 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.

### *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 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.



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### *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](mailto:grimsarghwetlandstrust@gmail.com). Remember, it is now possible to pay your subscriptions using *Paypal*.

### *Acknowledgements*

We thank Geoff Carefoot, Dominic Best, Gavin Thomas and Longridge Men's Shed 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**

