

CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

WIRRAL WILDLIFE ANNUAL REPORT 2015 to 2016

I'm delighted to be able to report another successful year for Wirral Wildlife, providing environmental education, conserving our reserves and protecting the environment whilst raising money to cover the Group's expenses and contribute to Cheshire Wildlife Trust's funds.

I would like to thank the many professional experts who give their time and expertise so generously through the year, and contribute so much to the work of the committee and to our events and activities, and to all who volunteer and participate in our activities.

Our membership and distribution secretary Jim Gilmour resigned from the committee in October 2015 after over 20 years during most of which time he was committee secretary. In addition, he co-ordinated the huge task of paper newsletter distribution and indeed was its editor for a period. The committee is most appreciative of the enormous contribution he made over the years.

In March 2016 we were forewarned of more change when Mike Maher (reserve manager at Cleaver Heath and major mover in our annual plant sale) told us he would be leaving the Committee, although he will continue to be a very active volunteer with the Group.

How lucky we have been to have had the benefit of their efforts.

Our conservation officer continues to advise community groups and land managers about encouraging wildlife on their land. This year this has included new friends' groups for Dawstone Park, Heswall, and Harrison Park, Wallasey as they applied for their first Green Flags. A small group continues to advise the Land Trust and Autism Together on the management of Port Sunlight River Park and the Old Court House, Bromborough. We continue to advise and support Wirral's depleted Ranger Service and other Parks staff.

We organised various training courses for wildlife recorders, including ones on wild flowers, grasses and butterflies, using our reserves at New Ferry Butterfly Park and Red Rocks. Informal training takes place all season, as experienced recorders take new ones out on site surveys of SSSIs and SBIs. Twelve sites (SSSIs, SBIs and a few miscellaneous) were surveyed and reported upon by members of our recording team. Their work is invaluable in guiding and monitoring sustainable development, wildlife protection and positive measures for conservation

We are keeping a watching brief on the proposed Hoylake Golf Resort, which has serious implications for wildlife on and adjacent to the area. We have met with local people, Wirral Borough Council, RSPB and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service. We continue to respond to consultations on the Local Plans for Cheshire West and Chester and Wirral Borough.

Our planning officer reviews planning applications submitted to Wirral Council for their implications for wildlife and, where appropriate, makes representations to prevent pollution and protect the landscape and habitat of birds, bats, badgers and other rare and protected species. In six months alone, Wirral Wildlife commented on 51 planning applications and in 70% of these our response influenced the planning decision.

As always, reserves were a major focus of activity. Management groups have now been established for all our Wirral reserves, so that staff, volunteers and local experts can agree what needs doing and how.

New Ferry Butterfly Park attracted 2,501 visitors during the summer season, the most to date. This is a great place to engage the public with wildlife. The May 2015 open day saw the opening of the compost loo by the Mayor of Wirral. Lord Lyndon Harrison, Baron of Chester, who originally opened the park in

1995, helped celebrate the park being open to the public for 20 years by cutting a celebratory cake at the community BBQ in August and raised the Green Flag which was gained with higher score of 84%. An art work heavily featuring the butterfly park was installed in the renovated underpass at Bebington Station. The park was chosen by customers of Bromborough ASDA for a donation when the park gained the most votes from customers. The park was listed in "Our top 10 great days out" in a widely distributed Merseyrail leaflet posted through resident doors. The park also appeared in a half page article in David Goode's New Naturalist book "Nature in Towns and Cities."

At Thornton Wood there was intensive activity to remove Himalayan balsam. It has been thinned but still presents an extensive problem in the Wood.

Cleaver Heath benefitted from monthly work parties from September to March, with around six volunteers each month. The Trust has provided some additional equipment for the volunteers and arranged a number of extra work parties for specific activities. Mike Maher is replaced as volunteer reserve manager by Alan Irving who continues to benefit from Mike's vast experience.

Our programme of outdoor events for the year included a bluebell walk in Dibbinsdale, a geology walk at Thurstaston shore, a family beach and discovery walk at New Brighton and two walks at Cleaver Heath: the first to enjoy the dawn chorus and the second to appreciate the beauty of Heswall's heathlands. Our annual Apple Day at Eastham Country Park was its usual success, and we participated in Ness Children's Day, as well as raising the profile of the Trust with information stalls at Wirral Parks Forum, Heswall U3A's wildlife morning and the West Kirkby Earth Fest.

Our monthly illustrated talks at Heswall Hall from September through to April covered a fascinating range of topics from local speakers. Barbara and Eric Greenwood began the season on rainforests around the world, followed by: Anne Litherland and Hilary Ash on Port Sunlight River Park; the ecology of wind farms from Ken Neal; Cheshire Wildlife Trust's volunteering project Natural Futures from Kevin Feeney; Matt Thomas on the inspirational island of Hilbre; and we finished the season with Emeritus Professor David Tomlinson's talk about butterflies and global warming.

During the course of this year we stopped producing a paper newsletter and decided to add more news items to our online blog. Each month we send an email to our supporters to remind them of upcoming events and to direct them to our blog. We have also recently launched a Wirral Wildlife Facebook page in order to reach more people and be able to share even more photographs and information.

Our honorary treasurer continues his sterling work to ensure our finances are in good order and that all transactions are accounted for. Once again he has added to our funds through sponsorship of his participation in the Wirral Coastal Walk and by devising a prize wildlife quiz.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our members for their support during 2015/16 and we hope you will continue your support.

Stephen R. Ross

Chairman