

CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST  
WIRRAL WILDLIFE LOCAL GROUP  
45<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017

We are just one hundred and sixteen years since Charles Rothschild's concern for the environment led to the identification of one hundred special places which he believed should be preserved as nature reserves. We are still losing species and important habitats despite all that has been achieved by what has become the Wildlife Trusts movement and their 800,000 members and active volunteers.

We are grateful to Cheshire Wildlife Trust for their support and encouragement. We have in return been able to raise funds for the Trust which they have spent in Wirral.

It is a pleasure and privilege to be involved in such a lively and dynamic Group as Wirral Wildlife, who apart from the committee, are supported by around one hundred volunteers who give generously of their time and expertise, be it engaging with children and adults at events, wildlife recording or active conservation on our Local Reserves.

This year has seen Dr Hilary Ash, our Honorary Conservation Officer, rewarded for her outstanding contribution to conservation. She received the National Green Flag, Volunteer of the Year Award. It is a fitting tribute to her work at New Ferry Butterfly Park where she has played an instrumental role in the development of the Park over many years transforming it from disused railway sidings to an enchanting, diverse, wildlife haven. It is situated in an area of social deprivation and is thereby a particularly valuable resource. It is all run by volunteers. She has developed Training Days for the Voluntary Wardens who have brought the place alive for visitors. Hilary also provides training courses there which include grass and wild flower identification. In addition to the public, groups from schools, college and university visit regularly as do others such as Guides and Scouts. She both educates and entertains all our visitors in equal measure.

In March 2017 Hilary was also presented with the Cheshire Woman of the Year Award for her outstanding contribution to the natural environment in Wirral.

I am, as ever, indebted to every member of the committee who work so hard to enable us to present a full programme of events and activities by which we seek

to educate, inform, inspire and entertain people of all ages and backgrounds about wildlife and conservation. We meet every six weeks but considerable work is undertaken by each member to facilitate delivery of the programme, operating our website, blog and Facebook, making bookings, finding speakers, obtaining and assembly of materials,( you would be astonished at the number of plastic bottles needed for children to make bug houses at Ness) rota arrangements and participation at the functions. I do believe that we punch above our weight and go the extra mile. Indeed our Treasurer, John Gill regularly does this quite literally by undertaking the Wirral Coastal Walk to raise funds for us and that is fifteen miles! We were sorry to see Mike Maher retire as Voluntary Warden of Cleaver Heath and greatly appreciate all that he did. Thankfully he still produces many plants for our annual sale. We welcome Alan Irving in his place and welcome his contribution in committee.

Once again we have aimed to produce a varied comprehensive programme throughout the year which has totalled over twenty activities. We are pleased that our monthly talks at Heswall Hall from September to March are being well supported. This year we have learnt about climate change and its effects on butterflies, the work of Wirral Tree Wardens, wild places and wild things, the wonders of hedge laying, shore life and the lost mosses of Delamere. Our speakers have brought their subjects to life with many fine photographs and other visual aids and exhibits which have included buckets of Dee Estuary mud and its inhabitants!

Our spring and summer activities have included guided walks which have addressed geology, bluebells, ancient woodlands, lowland heath, botany and dawn chorus to hear native and migrant birds. There are regular work parties at Cleaver Heath and through Wirral Countryside Volunteers at our Dibbinsdale area reserves.

We have supported Ness Gardens Swarm to Ness about bees and pollinators and their Children's Day where we provide wildlife focussed activities. At New Ferry Butterfly Park opening day we sold cakes and plants produced by our members to raise funds. We have attended Wirral Autistic Fun Day, Harrison Park, West Kirby Earth Fest, Science under the Stars at Gayton Primary School and Apple Day at Eastham Country Park supported by the Mersey Morris Men, where the objective is to encourage the consumption of British Apples and the conservation of orchards which have high wildlife value.

We give advice and support regarding wildlife to the Friends groups at a number of parks and to others seeking help in encouraging wildlife in schools and other open spaces.

We greatly appreciate the work of our wildlife recording team who regularly reassess sites so that we can monitor changes in flora and fauna over the long term. It underlies all that we do and is the bedrock of conservation.

A major and time consuming effort is involved in considering all planning applications in Wirral and assessing their impact on wildlife. We often seek conditions to protect bats, badgers and to control polluted water from entering the environment. We respond to Public Consultations from Local and Central Government regarding planning or proposed development. We are most fortunate to have highly qualified people to undertake such tasks.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading of our activities and hope that you will consider joining us to take the work forward. We do have a lot of fun.

To end on a high note in November 2016 we learnt that the Group had been nominated for a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. We entered an assessment process which involved interviews and visits to our Reserves and at the year's end we knew that we would have to await the outcome still some months ahead. I know that we were all delighted and thankful to have been considered for such an Honour.

Stephen Ross

Chair