



Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Wirral Wildlife Local Group

49th ANNUAL REPORT 30th APRIL 2020 UNTIL 31st March 2021



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Naturally we have had to adjust our activities in response to this second year of the Covid 19 pandemic including its new variants. We have complied fully with the restrictions imposed in the interests of public health. Thus we have held no public meetings or events, many active volunteering opportunities were closed but some recording and some permitted conservation efforts continued and increased with the relaxation of rules so that up to thirty volunteers could engage with us. Committee meetings have been held remotely via Zoom on eight occasions.

Our desire to offer public talks via Zoom were frustrated by IT issues but we hope to resume normal activities in the autumn of 2021. We are greatly indebted to Linda and Laura Higginbottom for operating our website and Facebook, including the New Ferry Butterfly Park page, so that there can be two-way engagement with our members. To this end each month around 800 Wirral Members are sent a list of forthcoming events and news. We have reached over one thousand followers on Facebook. Linda supplies updated information both to those systems but also to our blog which often leads to the additional pleasure in being able to respond to individuals. We are most gratified by the response of members to us via these media and have enjoyed their many splendid photographs.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS have continued as normal. The Wirral Local Plan has been scrutinised by Hilary Ash together with staff from CWT and some volunteers. Responses were submitted to the questions posed but we have also sent a supplementary document about the impacts on wildlife at specific sites. These remain contentious and most damaging issues. We contributed to the England Tree Strategy and input to two Government consultations on planning. Work has been done on the Ash Dieback Strategy. A response has been submitted regarding the Environment Bill. We have taken part in the Green & Blue Infrastructure Study run by consultants for Wirral MBC.

PLANNING: Caroline Smallthwaite makes a remarkable contribution to our endeavours by checking relevant Planning Application in Wirral for potential adverse impacts on wildlife. There were over sixty this year. It requires her to examine the detailed plans and supporting statements to determine the appropriate response from outright objection to proposing a range of conditions. These have included a delay until the Local Plan is complete; bat, badger and bird issues from roosts and disturbance by noise or lighting; biodiversity enhancements; tree surveys; good construction practice to prevent contamination of a river; protection of ponds during development; the installation of bird and bat boxes; the updating of ecological surveys prior to decision. She has responded to requests from the Heswall Society and others where wildlife issues have arisen. It was good to see that WMBC refused a large planning application because the developer had not compensated for tree loss under net biodiversity gain.

RECORDING: Sarah Woodhouse withdrew from recording for personal reasons. We thank her for her efforts. Ron Warne continues to oversee recording in the SSSIs. We are seeking a replacement for Sarah but have been pleased to welcome some new volunteers to the work. Margaret Jackson has offered to assist with computing. Heswall Dales heathland and some woodland has been surveyed.

Thurstaston Common quadrats have been surveyed and the data and ecological notes submitted to the National Trust and to Prof Rob Marrs who will analyse the changes now discernible through time.

The HLF Project originally called Dee Coastliners has been renamed, 'Our Dee Estuary'. WMBC are considering supporting it thanks to input by Hilary Ash. We are grateful that Tim Gannicliffe is our representative on the Tidal Dee Catchment Partnership who oversee the project, as well as undertaking much survey and conservation work. A major application for next stage funding has been submitted. The objective is to reinvigorate the Deeside Communities using the Estuary as a focus through ground breaking innovation.

CLEAVER HEATH: Alan Irving who has been our Voluntary Warden at Cleaver Heath for some years has had to retire for health reasons. He has undertaken invaluable conservation work and had led a volunteer group as well as leading many guided walks including the Dawn Chorus. In addition to the heath he has surveyed birds, butterflies and lizards. His newsletters have been first rate - both attractive and informative. His knowledge and understanding have been greatly valued by all who have come to know him. He collaborated in the establishment of Wirral Heathland Partnership to aid the conservation of these rare endangered habitats, through the dissemination of best practice. He was also an enthusiastic member of the Friends of Heswall Dales. He made an outstanding contribution to our deliberations in committee. His retirement occurred after the end of the year in question but it seems right to include it here.

We thank him for it all and wish him well for the future

NEW FERRY BUTTERFLY PARK: This is now in its twenty fifth year. Owing to its unique history, nature, high visitor numbers and high conservation needs the organisation operates with its own committee. Many members serve on this and Wirral Wildlife. The leading lights are Hilary Ash who has written a history of the Park and Paul Loughnane BEM who, in addition, runs Wirral Countryside Volunteers. Both make an outstanding contribution to our work across all the reserves. We could not function effectively without the, well directed, vigorous 'hands on' actions of the volunteers who scythe, hedge lay, mow, prune and coppice their way across our landscapes. They work hard in places such as Thornton Wood to tackle a range of invasive species. They clearly have great fun and we are lucky to have them. The Park was able to open for visits using a one-way Covid secure system. We will celebrate the delayed Silver Jubilee next year. We thank James Melling of CWT who has produced a You Tube video of the Park. Hilary Ash has advised WMBC on a Pollinator Action Plan – trialling of wild flower planting on road verges and advised on changing mowing regimes in Wirral. Hilary is involved in Wirral Tree Strategy and has composed our statement of support. She has written insect friendly gardening notes for use on CWT social media. MPs Angela Eagle and Alison McGovern visited NFBP and met Charlotte Harris CEO CWT and Hilary when issues of concern regarding future legislation were discussed.

SECRETARY: Margaret Jackson, fulfils this vital role with her painstaking attention to detail, comprehensive collation of reports and minute taking followed up with amiable reminders and timely requests. The reports and minutes often run to seven pages encompassing many technical issues. We receive full reports at every meeting from our Voluntary Wardens regarding the state of each reserve and describing the tasks undertaken to conserve them – much hard physical work by so many volunteers who bring a plethora of skills and knowledge to our aid. We are so grateful.

TREASURER: Gillian Lacy has prepared her report, which is available. I am delighted that our finances are in good hands and am grateful for her work. Our income has been aided by Barbara Greenwood who sold plants from her gate for our benefit. Also Mike Maher cultivated a forest of plants which have been sold to visitors at NFBP again for our benefit. He also assists at Cleaver Heath. John Gill has raised funds by running a series of brain teasing quizzes. I do hope that all our readers have had

a go. They will aid your mental acuity and keep you out of mischief. We are most appreciative of all this support.

TALKS: We are fortunate to have Sally Walsh who makes arrangements for our speakers and meetings. Although she has had a quiet year she has produced excellent speakers on a wide range of topics. We have a good programme for you as soon as Covid permits.

CHESHIRE WT: We are fortunate to be part of such a charity as this. We feel supported and enjoy the constructive approach of the Chairman Bill Stothart, Chief Executive, Charlotte Harris and Sarah Bennett together with the staff team. We realise that they have all had a most difficult period and there have been many changes. We shall all stand together.

CONCLUSION: As Wirral Wildlife Group enters its fiftieth year we can look back on all that this always dynamic group has achieved and look forward to a celebration. We shall remember our first Chairman Major Frank White who established the Group in 1971 and the inspirational chairmanship of Graham Harrison DSC who laid the foundations during the seventies and eighties which have stood the test of time so well. He was succeeded by Marjorie Wilson for some five years who was followed by Frank Cottrell who was chair for some nine years and who secured NFBP and who still observes our affairs closely. I became chair in 2004, it was a steep learning curve becoming the recipient of such a volume of information and expertise covering such a range of subjects. All members of the Group were thrilled when we received The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2017. We must remain resolute and determined. During this year we have seen the misery of a pandemic, the increasing impact of climate change throughout the world from burning forests and tundra, ice melt, acute droughts and violent weather, largely attributable to the activities of one species - Man. We can but hope that the proposed Conference of the Parties – COP 26 – of those States who signed the UN Convention on Climate Change in 1994 will face up to the challenges at Glasgow this autumn of 2021, for the sake of all species who live on earth. For our part we must rise to the challenges which confront us in Wirral, aid and assist like-minded groups and use our knowledge and expertise to influence local and central government in matters which affect our local environment. We must seek to protect and enhance all SSSIs, local wildlife sites and safeguard the Dee Estuary Ramsar Site, Special Protection Areas together with Special Areas of Conservation. We must be forever vigilant and determined. The threats we encounter are, all too often, from developers seeking maximum profit with little regard for the consequences.

We are, as ever, grateful to all who support us and encourage you to ask your friends to join us. Hopefully a number of you will want to take a more active role. Do come and follow your interest. You will be made most welcome. Remember that if Man fails to address climate change and all the ice on earth melts then Wirral and the Palace of Westminster will be under 230 feet [70m] of water, all that new gold leaf will be for the fishes to admire.

We look forward to meeting with you whilst we enjoy the best of our local wild places or take part in other activities.

Stephen R. Ross

Chair of Wirral Wildlife Local Group