



**Cheshire
Wildlife Trust**
Wirral Wildlife Local Group



CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

WIRRAL WILDLIFE LOCAL GROUP, Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

52ND ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2023 UNTIL MARCH 2024

It is always a pleasure to review and to consider all that the Group has accomplished in the previous year which was our fifty second. We are now in the reign of our second Sovereign, having outlasted the administrations of twelve Prime Ministers an achievement of which we can be justly proud. [Though admittedly for the botanists, one PM was outlived by a lettuce] Unlike the political class, whose attention span and policies are directed to the next election, never more than five years away, we take the long -term view, of how best we can Inspire, inform, educate and hence raise public awareness and understanding of the complexities of climate, environment, ecology, flora and fauna both across the world and to encourage everyone to protect, conserve and enhance nature within The Wirral Peninsula.

We are a collaborative Group, both in this year's nine committee meetings and in far wider community engagement. All members bring an array of skills and experience to bear on our deliberations. Many are members of other organisations in which mutual support brings positive benefit – it includes the Dee Estuary Conservation Group, so central to the protection and enhancement of this priceless ecological treasure and RAMSAR site. New Ferry Butterfly Park, the jewel in our crown, is an outstanding example of an urban nature reserve with a unique tapestry of habitats accommodating an unusual spectrum of flora and invertebrates, supporting other wildlife. It attracts children of all ages – who then bring their parents and many students undertaking both first degrees and higher studies. It has its own committee. We are delighted that they have been awarded another Green Flag. John McGaw and volunteers oversee the conservation of Cleaver Heath, a fragment of Lowland Heath – one of the rarest habitats in the UK. We hold monies raised by Woodchurch High School pupils for heather restoration which we shall complete next autumn following weather delays to the contractor's schedule. We are fortunate to have John McGaw, also known as the Spider Man for his arachnid displays. Mike Maher grows a profusion of plants each year which are sold to support our funds. He has raised in excess of a thousand pounds. We are literally in his debt and are most grateful. John Gill continues to produce quiz sheets which both challenge and amuse so adds grist to our mill.

Paul Loughnane, who is both Secretary of New Ferry Butterfly Park and of Wirral Countryside Volunteers, who provide invaluable assistance to our efforts – hedge laying, coppicing, scything their way across NFBP and ancient woodlands. This year WCV planted a Wild Pear Tree at Tom's Paddock in memory of John Magee, who gave over twenty years' service including some years as WCV Chair. they will always welcome you, so go and try it out.

We have been delighted to be fully engaged with the Wirral Green Space Alliance to mount opposition to Leverhulme Estates Planning Applications which would have trashed invaluable natural

habitats in Wirral MBC and would also have negated the Local Plan, causing irreversible damage. Both major parties are talking about revoking much planning regulation to enable Green Belt and other Development to occur, allegedly in the National Interest, despite local opposition, so I fear we will be fully occupied in times ahead. In a representative democracy such autocratic behaviour from afar, would be, at best, questionable and could be counter-productive. I well remember [1962] Liverpool, then a city of 765,641 citizens being referred to by HMIs as Borough 493. Such arrogant contempt is best avoided.

We hold regular wildlife talks from September until March, aimed to address the spectrum of interests and concerns regarding the natural world. This year has been no exception. In April 23 Graham Jones RSPB Manager, updated us comprehensively on their activities on the Dee and at Burton Wetlands. In October Monica McCard, a new Wirral Wildlife Committee member, gave a fascinating account of Ecological Impacts and behavioural interactions of the notorious Lion Fish which has become a damaging, invasive species in the western Atlantic and Mediterranean, far from their origin. She outlined experiments on its feeding habits to ascertain future control methods. In November Tony Parker introduced us to a remarkable number of mammals who live in Cheshire – backed up with first class pictures and facts. In January 24 David Parker, a respected ecologist, now Chair of Dee Estuary Conservation Group and heavily involved with the, 'Our Dee Estuary Project' discussed the desirability and practice of connecting people with nature. In February Nicola Wallbank, Tree Officer of Wirral MBC talked of nurturing Wirral's tree canopy and all that is involved. In March we were treated by Penny Rudd of Chester Zoo to an overview and evaluation of the experimental Harvest Mouse Release Scheme now in its twentieth year. It has been and remains ground breaking science and the lessons learned would apply to the reintroduction of any species anywhere. All backed up with glorious photography. We are most grateful to Phillipa Loughnane for her production of mouth-watering cake, tea and coffee. It is splendid to see people socialising, networking and enjoying the experience. We are happily settled at Thornton Hough Women's Institute which is well furnished and equipped.

In months with longer daylight, we provide seasonal events such as Bluebell Walks, the annual opening of the New Ferry Butterfly Park Season, is also a major fundraising and publicity opportunity attracting around a thousand visitors. The Park is open every Sunday Afternoon from May until September. We ran stalls at Neston Earth Fest, supported a bioblitz at Gayton, attended the Cool Heswall environmental day. In July we were most grateful to benefit from an Open Day and cream tea at historic Poulton Hall and gardens by courtesy of the Lancelyn Greens, whose family have resided there for some nine hundred years. Wirral Countryside Volunteers demonstrated hedge laying and the botanical wonders of the meadows were explained by Dr Hilary Ash on guided walks.

We have conferred with agencies who have congruent interests such as Merseyside Police Wildlife team to discuss matters of mutual concern and with Jake Williams, Climate Emergency Project Officer of Wirral MBC. We met many people at the Wirral History & Heritage Fair, always an entertaining experience with excellent networking opportunities.

We always welcome enquiries from Members, and anyone else who needs help with nature enhancement activities such as rewilding projects. Thus, we have advised a number of schools, Friends Groups, allotment holders, sports clubs and some individuals. We are most fortunate to have such a highly qualified committee and wider team to call upon.

We, for over thirty years, have had the particular benefit of the expertise possessed by Dr Hilary Ash, who is able to respond to the most complex planning applications, and to public consultations both at national and local level. She has submitted many thousands of words in defence of the

environment. She is without doubt greatly respected by the teams at Natural England, Wirral MBC, Liverpool City Region staff and the many projects she has supported. She was the only individual singled out by Leverhulme Estates as the person whose evidence they had to overcome to succeed with their planning applications. It is clear that they failed to do so and everyone in Wirral is greatly in her debt. Hilary runs many training courses and greatly assists our recording team. Indeed, many of our, once young, recorders now hold high qualifications and professional employment with Natural England and respected consultancies. Hilary is heavily engaged with New Ferry Butterfly Park, indeed a veritable human dynamo in perpetual motion.

Recording of flora and fauna in Wirral both, throughout our existence and now, by regular ongoing assessment is fundamental to understanding the state of nature here. We must know what we are gaining and losing and be alert to Impacts of climate change, the arrival of new invasive species, the northward advance of Southern life forms – butterflies and plants. All must be identified and recorded. We treasure the group of around thirty who bring their skills to bear on this vital undertaking. We welcome and encourage those who wish to take part and assist them with training be it for pure pleasure or indeed as experience on which to build a future career. Because of safeguarding rules, we are only able to accept those aged over eighteen years. All work as teams of at least two. We hold meetings with the entire group several times per year. We aim to reassess all the sites we cover on a ten - year cycle. They organise the work schedules and allocations whilst Margaret Jackson retains the records. Additional volunteers, especially with rare knowledge, are most welcome – arachnids, entomology, fungi, mammals, marine, as well as botany which is always so crucial.

I am, as ever indebted to the rest of the Committee. We have welcomed Kate Hart who now arranges our speaker programme, and is a Wildlife Recorder and Monica McCard who has a busy professional life at JMU. Caroline Smallthwaite responds to Wirral Planning Applications, commenting on measures to protect wildlife, such as addressing the needs of birds, bats and other factors such as the control of run off pollution. Linda Higginbottom, with much welcome assistance from her daughter, Laura operates our vital communications with our members and with the public via our website, Blog and monthly newsletters which traverse the world. Please sign up if you would like to keep abreast of all our activities – there is no need for you to miss any. Margaret Jackson brings her vast experience to bear on our progress and produces all agendas, makes compilations of the reports to committee and produces excellent minutes. She has hosted Recorders' meetings. Everyone needs a Treasurer and I appreciate all that Gillian Lacy does for the group.

We must acknowledge the ready assistance of all involved at CWT at Bickley Hall Farm, Trustees, Charlotte Harris the CEO and Kellie Barnard who makes a valued contribution to our committee.

We are of course a tiny part of a very large picture. There is but one world and no PLANet B! The environment is in crisis, emissions of green- house gasses are overheating the atmosphere. Hot air holds more water than cold air so we face increasing flood risk but also rising temperatures and sustained drought is destabilising communities. CO2 levels before the industrial revolution were 280 parts per million, in 1950 they were 300 PPM but are now at 430 PPM. The scientific community believes that we should not allow temperatures to exceed the 1.5 C boundary but it has now done so and we have recorded the highest surface sea temperature across the world ever known. The human population in 1500 CE was estimated to be 461Million. UN Stats say that in February 24 it had risen to 8 billion. The 28th Conference of the Parties to the original 1972 UN Meeting was held in Dubai where, sadly, toothless resolutions, which are without any meaningful measured or enforceable commitments, were passed. However, I trust that reality is beginning to dawn on those in power.

Wirral Wildlife can but continue to raise awareness in our small way and encourage others to answer the call. In this matter scientific knowledge will triumph over those who remain closer to beliefs in the Flat Earth perspectives. We hope you will enjoy, remain with us and encourage others to join us on our journey.

Stephen R. Ross

Chair of Wirral Wildlife Committee