

CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

WIRRAL WILDLIFE LOCAL GROUP

48th ANNUAL REPORT from 1st April 2019 until 31st March 2020.

Before accounting for eleven splendid months of activities and events, I shall address the wider issues of the twelfth, which resembled living in chaos theory. [Remember that Chaos theory speaks of the random consequences of actions as trivial as the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon – they never mentioned bats wings]. Have we all not lived through a time of life changing and unusual events which began to impact upon these islands at the end of our year in March 2020? Covid 19, one of the Coronavirus family of viruses appears to have crossed the species threshold, possibly from bats, into humans in Wuhan and has rapidly spanned much of the world. We now use powerful electron microscopes to examine this tiny organism which measures 0.00012 of a millimetre across. At a magnification of 500,000, which produces a useful image, a six foot man could lay his head in Wirral and his feet in mid Turkey some hundreds of miles East of Ankara. Perhaps Covid 19 is a species which we should seek to conserve but only in the secure confines of places such as Porton Down. Our thoughts are with all who have suffered bereavement and other loss at what has become a time of such anxiety, sadness and turbulence. It is an experience from which we must learn, as this was by no means the first and will not be the last pandemic.

It reminded us all that we live on a lump of rock which has been hurtling through space for some billions of years, and which through the benefit of the sun and by the opportunity of being placed in the habitable zone has enabled life to evolve in all its incredible diversity. The activities of mankind continue to threaten the long term viability of our own existence through the emission of greenhouse gasses, overpopulation and the destruction of the natural environment.

Now let us turn to the eleven normal months which we all enjoyed. Wirral Wildlife has been happy to support Liverpool City Region, Year of the Environment. The prospect of a Mersey Barrage has again been raised and we can only hope that with new scientific and engineering advances damage to the environment will be minimised. We are glad that Wirral Borough has sought to reduce its carbon footprint by adopting LED bulbs in all street lighting, and that the council expresses a desire to address issues of environmental concern. All matters relating to the production of the Local Plan regarding future housing need and consequent threats to the Green Belt and connectivity through wildlife corridors which support our SSSIs are ongoing and of great concern. We appreciate the efforts made by the other environmental and amenity groups in Wirral to safeguard the natural heritage of this unique area through their detailed and professional objections.

We are, as ever, grateful for the support of Cheshire Wildlife Trust [CWT], trustees, and staff team, particularly Rachael Giles and Jess Walkup in helping to take our work forward, and have been delighted to welcome a number of new CWT staff team members to our committee meetings. In the last month of the year the Trust had to respond to Covid 19 by suspending most activity and by furloughing many staff. We sympathise with all who find themselves in this position and look forward to meeting again in better times. At the CWT AGM at Ness Gardens we were so happy to see Tim Gannicliffe receive The Eric Thurston Award for his outstanding contribution to the Trust in Wirral for over twenty seven years. He carries out vital fresh water invertebrate surveys in Local Wildlife Sites and in the Clatterbrook. He also

assesses nitrogen inputs at Red Rocks and Thornton Wood and makes a valued contribution to New Ferry Butterfly Park. He is an active hands-on conservationist who loves sharing his enthusiasm with visitors and fellow volunteers. We are sure he will bring his insight and skills to bear in his new venture, membership of the steering committee of the Dee Coastliners Project.

Wirral Wildlife is, as always, indebted to all who work with Wirral Countryside Volunteers who do so much to fulfil the management plans for our ancient woodlands and other reserves. It is vital work much of which is out of the public eye. It is so good to have their Secretary Paul Loughnane as a member of our Committee.

Wirral Wildlife held six committee meetings this year, through which our work across the whole spectrum of activity is directed. Each function is supported by reports and appendices circulated beforehand. It is a pleasure to be able to read such comprehensive comment on every aspect of the work. We are indeed fortunate to have a team of such ability and experience which they give so willingly to the cause. I greatly appreciate the work of Margaret Jackson who keeps the machinery running smoothly. We were delighted when Gillian Lacy agreed to become Hon Treasurer following John Gill's retirement.

We also welcomed Ron Warne and Sarah Woodhouse as organisers of our Recording Team following Edwin Samuels' retirement. Recording of species is fundamental to our conservation work. We must know what species we have gained, retained or lost. This year sites surveyed included heathland, woodland, grassland, a golf course, marshland, fields, New Ferry Butterfly Park, and a number of ponds. Many Recorders have botanical interests, others have expertise in areas such as birds, freshwater life, reptiles, butterflies and other insects. John McGaw the spider man, makes regular contributions. We would love to assist you to develop your knowledge in your chosen field of study. If it lives or may live in Wirral, in ancient woodland, lowland heath, sand dunes, fresh water or marine mud, ponds or streams then please ask.

We ran our series of Events at Heswall Hall from September until it was interrupted in mid-March by the covid 19 lockdown. It is our aim to cover as many aspects of the natural world as possible in each annual session and also to ensure that over a period of years we leave nothing out. Thus this year we enjoyed a talk by Paul Oldfield on the work of the Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust regarding the environmental mitigation arising from the new bridge across the Mersey. Greer Lacy talked knowledgeably of the work of the Wirral Animal Sanctuary and Hog Centre. Following our AGM Hilary Ash engaged with the audience in a talk and discussion of the major issues facing wildlife and green spaces in Wirral. Sarah Bennett of CWT talked of the conservation of Natterjack toads at Red Rocks and work on the reserve. She also told us about the Dee Coastliners Project [for which she is developing a bid for Heritage Lottery Funding [HLF]] by which it is hoped to engage and empower disadvantaged people and communities around the Dee by focusing on the River Estuary as a resource. In January, Saul Burton vividly described the living landscape of Halkyn Mountain and the impact of mining which endures to this day. Dave Hollis gave a wonderful account of Dragon and Damsel Flies- all supported with excellent photography. The final talk was by Andrew Jennings-Giles of Port Sunlight River Park on its creation and management, a detailed and fascinating story. We all appreciate the efforts made by Sally Walsh to make the bookings and other arrangements.

It is always a great pleasure to share the wonders of Wirral with those who join us in our range of Activities. In May Peter Miller and Hilary Ash led a Bluebell Walk round Dibbinsdale in which

the beauty and complexities of ancient woodland were revealed. The Dawn Chorus walk from Cleaver Heath was led by Alan Irving when the array of migrant and resident bird life could be both heard and seen. He later ran the Heathland walk when he described the landscape and management issues of this rare habitat. The Open Day and fund raiser was held at New Ferry Butterfly Park at which many children dipped the pond for newts and invertebrates, learnt about spiders and much else. Our plant sale was successful and thanks are owed to Mike Maher who produced a field full for us. Others ran cake stalls and tombola. Later in the year there was a volunteers BBQ at which the Park was awarded another Green Flag. It is a great achievement which reflects a prodigious amount of work. Hilary Davies showed us the geological structure of Wirral, and of Thurstaston Common in particular. She has a wonderful ability to relate to people of all ages and to bring the subject to life. We had stalls at Science under the Stars and at Ness Children's Day. It is so positive to engage with both parents and children. Earth Fest is also a valuable experience for public engagement and networking. We all enjoy Apple Day at Eastham Country Park by which we encourage the use of English Apples. We appreciate the support of the Mersey Morris Men at Apple Day each year.

We are as ever grateful for the active support of Wirral Countryside Volunteers who do so much conservation in Dibbinsdale area and New Ferry Butterfly Park and to those who volunteer at Cleaver Heath. It is so good to see the mixture of ages, experience and learning being shared. We greatly appreciate the input of Alan Irving at Cleaver Heath and Paul Loughnane at New Ferry Butterfly Park and Dibbinsdale.

Caroline Smallthwaite examines every Planning Application in Wirral and comments about wildlife issues, often seeking badger or bat conditions and commenting on pollution and drainage matters. We are thankful for her great contribution.

Hilary Ash, in addition to her commitment to New Ferry Butterfly Park, to recording and to other voluntary groups seeking advice on wildlife matters, continues to address the major issues such as the Local Plan and to respond to other governmental consultations. It is high level professional work, both demanding and time consuming. It is a remarkable contribution to our cause. She also collaborated with the Tree Council who held an inspirational forum in Birkenhead. We hope it will lead to new policies on trees in Wirral.

We attended several meetings of the North West Coastal Forum to aid formulation of the requirements of the new Marine Bill. We have also drawn the attention of Ministers to a number of our concerns.

In these strange times we are more reliant than ever on social media and could not manage without the considerable efforts of Linda Higginbottom and daughter Laura who oversee our publicity, website, Blog and Facebook page, which is followed by hundreds of people. Thank you all for following us.

Our 49th year which commenced on 1st April may have little to show for itself but do not be downcast for it is said that when the going gets tough, the tough get going and as we approach our 50th year we shall not falter in our resolve to protect and enhance the natural environment of Wirral and never has our work had greater relevance. It also enjoys increasing public awareness and support especially amongst young people who are concerned by the environmental inheritance they will receive. We shall prepare to address our 50th year with great vigour and trust that more normal activities and events will, by then, be possible. We do

have much to celebrate and hope you will all take part with us. I am looking forward to a talk on the Antarctic by Jess Walkup already pencilled in.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement. We will meet again.

Stephen R. Ross

Chairman Wirral Wildlife Local Group