

WIRRAL WILDLIFE, QAVS, 54TH ANNUAL REPORT 1ST APRIL 2025 to 31ST MARCH 2026

We can say with pride, that Wirral Wildlife, Local Group of Cheshire Wildlife Trust has made a remarkable contribution for the last fifty-four years to wildlife conservation. We shall continue to uphold the citation on the Queen's Award granted in 2017 – Inspiring, informing, educating and encouraging people to protect nature in Wirral. This we do through work on our Reserves, by giving practical support and advice to others holding land with conservation potential – from small plots to dells, woodlands and school grounds. We engage with the public through our provision of talks and visits. We collaborate with those similarly engaged such as Wirral Countryside Volunteers, Dee Estuary Conservation Group and Wirral Green Space Alliance to achieve greater impact. We have expanded our team of Wildlife Recorders so that we can survey both more sites and repeat the process more regularly thus providing the essential bedrock of scientific fact, so essential to comprehending the complexity of changes to our wildlife and enabling us to address damaging planning applications, so vital in our nature depleted country. We are so grateful to all involved in the work. It is splendid that we provide training across seven specialisms and give support within the group to the rising generation.

In these challenging times where we see increasing pressures from central government by way of imposed housing numbers, a demand to submit a new Local Plan, despite the costly, recently approved Local Plan which has cross party agreement locally, we shall have to defend our environment with robust determination. We shall continue to protect our overall environment through submitting scientifically learned submissions covering planning applications and in response to public consultations from central and local government. It is detailed and demanding work. This year we have lodged a conditional objection to the Peak Cluster high pressure CO2 pipeline, unless they guarantee that no damage will be done to any of the 4 SSSIs, 42 LWS and 14 ancient woodlands along the route and that no installation footprints will be placed on designated sites, nor on wildlife corridors which would damage important habitats across Cheshire and Wirral Peninsula. The entire proposal is in fact already behind the latest scientific advances.

We have objected to the proposed solar farm at Thurstaston as the location is functionally linked to the Dee Estuary Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar Site. Essar at Stanlow is proposing a carbon capture scheme based on the importation of CO2 and green ammonia via Tranmere Oil Jetty requiring further pipeline installation.

Your committee continues to meet on a six-weekly cycle at which full and detailed reports covering all our activities are considered. We remain greatly indebted to our

Secretary, Dr Margaret Jackson for her collation and oversight of our administration and for her support of the Recorders. We appreciate the input of Cheshire WT by Trustees, CEO and staff members Rachael Nellist, Kellie Barnard into our committee and Graham Borden-Long for conservation at Cleaver Heath. Always helpful and constructive. Dr John McGaw and his volunteer group is grateful for the assistance. Post conservation groundwork there was a heath fire which has increased the burden on the group.

Our longstanding good fortune is to have had, throughout our history, the benefit of a highly qualified and experienced team who have always sought to take the work forward in line with the latest scientific findings. This year, Dr Hilary Ash received an Environmental Hero Award from Cool Wirral. It is richly deserved as she remains in a state of perpetual motion regarding all aspects of our work – from submission of learned papers to consultations and planning issues, provision of botanical training courses, engagement with recorders and copious support and advice to individuals and groups being also heavily involved with New Ferry Butterfly Park. She is both revered and respected by fellow professionals from Natural England, Liverpool City Region, Wirral Council and by the many people and organisations she has assisted in the area.

Kate Hart, reports to committee on Recording and is a Lead Botanical Recorder. We are indebted to Susanne Christian and Nif Wilkinson for their input into the Group and its programme. Kate also arranges our comprehensive evening talks programme which ran from September 25 until April 26 and is essential to our public engagement. Our first fascinating talk this year 11/4/25 was by Tony Parker on British Bees- their identification, ecology and behaviour. Ayla Thompson of Wirral BC gave a detailed and informative lecture on Biodiversity and nature recovery strategy. It is sad that she is now indisposed and we wish her well. In October Paul Nolan spoke on the value of nature and the impact of the Mersey Forest. In November Paul Loughnane, BEM, described the remarkable forty-year contribution of the Wirral Countryside Volunteers to conservation in Wirral and beyond. Paul's personal contribution to Wirral Wildlife, WCV and to the NFBP for so many years is also immeasurable and greatly appreciated. You may admire WCVs work at New Ferry BP but much else is done in ancient woodlands and in hedge laying. They welcome new people who wish to try their hand – so do have a go! In Jan '26 Eric Fletcher spoke on the value of wildlife recording which is so fundamental in our work. In Feb Dr Phil Putwain spoke about the remarkable creation of new Lowland Heath at Prees Heath to aid the Silver- studded Blue Butterfly. Phil is the Chair of the New Ferry Butterfly Park Committee. In March, to raise wider environmental issues and responses, we had an intriguing talk by Andrew Hodson on retro fitting a listed building [built c 1845] to Passivhaus Standards.

It is good to see so many regular attenders at Thornton Hough W.I on the second Friday of the month for 7:30 PM and are grateful to Philippa Loughnane and helpers for the refreshments which greatly aid our conviviality and networking opportunities.

Summer outdoor events included the Opening of New Ferry Butterfly Park by Justin Madders MP. It provides an invaluable opportunity to share our enjoyment of wildlife with so many people and to raise funds for the cause. It is a date not to be missed – the next one is on Sun 2nd May 2027 when we hope to see you! Cool Heswall similarly affords opportunities to talk of wildlife. We appreciated the fund-raising Open Day at Poulton Hall by courtesy of the Lancelyn- Greens. We attended presentations arranged in Hoylake by Jane Turner on biodiversity and sustainability. In August we took part in Nature Day at Ness Gardens, always a positive experience to encourage children. Anne Litherland has led several Bat walks and has assisted in bat assessments at other sites for which we are grateful.

Gillian Lacey our Hon Treasurer continues to account for our funds which is as essential as ever and for which we thank her.

Linda Higginbottom ably assisted by her daughter Laura oversees our extensive far-reaching communications to around a thousand people. Monthly notifications of events and activities to everyone who signs up for it, constant updating of the website and Blog. Prompt Response to engagement from members of the public. In this modern world we could not function without it. Linda is also much involved with NFBP. She is indeed a key member of the team, always helpful and supportive.

Caroline Smallthwaite our Hon Planning Officer, an Ecologist addresses Wirral Planning applications from a wildlife perspective. It is detailed essential and painstaking work calling for legislative knowledge and a comprehension of wildlife protection issues. Submissions this year have included seeking biodiversity enhancements, Bat Lighting conditions, A need for two separate Bat Surveys. Surveys for wintering birds, enhancements to biodiversity as detailed in the ecology report. Requirement for a European protected licence owing to bat roosts in the building. Owl mitigation plan, alternative swallow nesting sites.

Monica McCord continues to follow our work but remains heavily engaged with her students, at John Moores University.

Other random items have included the finding of two ancient oak trees, one in Thornton Wood and another ancient pollarded oak at Claremont Farm. Both have stood in plain sight for centuries. They will be further assessed and be entered on the Ancient Trees Inventory.

The National Trust are planting a national collection of Black Poplars at Killerton Estate which will include our four Wirral Clones which are unique.

All societies and institutions must plan for the future, encourage the young and enable them to assume office and take responsibility in the long term. I was first involved at the end of the last century at the time of the previous eclipse when I was asked to attend

Dee Estuary CG meetings and send reports to Wirral Wildlife. In 2004 I agreed to join the committee and to my astonishment was invited to take the Chair. In 2005 it was suggested that I should also become a trustee of CWT which role I performed until 2008. I have thought for some time that we would benefit from the appointment of a new young fully qualified, dynamic Chair. I am delighted that we have identified an eminently suitable and willing candidate, Craig Starkey and look forward to the AGM when he will be able to speak for himself.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and am most grateful to the many people and groups who have assisted in taking the work forward.

STEPHEN R. ROSS

CHAIR of WIRRAL WILDLIFE