

**CHESHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST**  
**WIRRAL WILDLIFE LOCAL GROUP, QAVS**  
**50<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REPORT, APRIL 2021 UNTIL MARCH 2022**

It was in 1972, now fifty years ago, since the first United Nations Climate Conference took place in Stockholm. As far back as 1949 matters discussed had mainly concerned planetary resources and industrial concerns but climate change had been raised.

As HM The Queen approaches her Platinum Jubilee [70 years] we shall mark that occasion in our next year. It is excellent that she has chosen a scheme to address the depletion of nature by promoting support for her Green Canopy of trees throughout The Commonwealth.

It is now reassuring to remember that what became Cheshire Wildlife Trust was founded sixty years ago and that Wirral Wildlife celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in November 2021.

It was sad that Frank Cottrell our former Chairman and the person who secured the name Wirral Wildlife and the greatly cherished New Ferry Butterfly Park, died shortly before the Celebration. His contribution to our work, and as CWT Trustee, will be appreciated and remembered by us all.

At Brotherton Park, we were delighted that The High Sheriff of Merseyside, Mr Nigel Lanceley presided over our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations and that so many others including Alison McGovern MP and Bill Stothart Chairman of Cheshire Wildlife Trust attended. Black Poplar Trees were planted in the woodland and fruit trees in the orchard. Cake was received from the point of a sword. It was particularly fitting that Nigel Lanceley could attend, as it was he who had completed the nomination process for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, which was granted in 2017.

We must hope that the development of the vaccines to fight Covid 19 and its variants enables normal life to be resumed whilst never forgetting those who have suffered so much.

World events continue to raise serious concerns, climate change is accelerating in Arctic regions and deforestation, to accommodate rising populations and drive agriculture is laying waste to the Amazon basin and in South East Asia.

China continues to increase use of fossil fuel and now we have war in Europe. We may anticipate increasingly adverse impacts on our own climate. All we can do is our best to conserve and enhance that which we have and to engage with the public to inform and inspire them to do likewise.

Closer to home we are confronted by proposals from developers to build major housing developments in Wirral across high quality agricultural Green Belt land by which our local environment would suffer great depletion and by which interconnectivity with Sites of Special Scientific Interest would suffer significant permanent damage. Most of the proposals are for expensive homes that would give maximum profit but which do not address the need for genuinely affordable housing. Government proposed housing figures for Wirral are greatly contested. The Wirral Local Plan continues to evolve and we shall respond. We have and shall continue to support Wirral Green Space Alliance in opposing such plans. I am indebted to Hilary Ash for her considerable efforts in addressing all the consultations in these matters.

As we strive to inspire, inform, educate and encourage people to protect nature in Wirral, our programme of events and activities are designed to cover a wide range of topics. At Thornton Hough Women's Institute we enjoyed a talk on saving the Grayling Butterfly, a species with an unusual lifestyle, by David Costello of Butterfly Conservation. The questions about the environmental issues arising from a return of the beaver were addressed by Martin Varley of CWT. A fascinating insight into the enhancement of wetlands, flood control and water retention especially in the face of climate change. A Fungal Foray opened our eyes to the number and complexity of the species within Dibbinsdale. This was led by John Ratcliffe. Richard Otyl told of his experiences as a farmer on taking on CWT land at Bickley. Prof Rob Marrs explained the history, science and methods of recording the conservation of the Quadrats on NT land at Thurstaston Common. Hilary Ash was responsible for the data set collection of over 20 years duration and now published in a peer review journal. It is the bedrock of conservation practice. Colin Usher gave an architect's experience of building low energy homes which must clearly be the future of construction in this country. Brian Anderson gave a fascinating presentation of bird life around the world, so many species filling so many habitable niches, to which each is so perfectly adapted. We appreciate Phillipa Loughnane's work on providing refreshments at our meetings.

We are delighted that Wirral Countryside Volunteers [WCV] give so generously of their time to engage in active conservation in our reserves. You will be made most welcome if you would like to try your hand at it. Regular work days are advertised on our website and all tools are provided. You will rapidly acquire new skills and understanding of conservation practice. You will see places of which you know nothing. It was a great pleasure to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday of John Magee who has done so much for conservation in Wirral and who as Reserves Officer was a committee member for many years. He watched from a warm lounge online, whilst a black poplar tree was planted in cold driving rain near Landican. We all enjoyed it and his laughter.

We are greatly in the debt of Linda Higginbottom and her daughter Laura who are central to our ability to communicate and to engage both with our members but also with the general public. The comprehensive website, [wirralwildlife.org.uk](http://wirralwildlife.org.uk), is kept up to date and has had 4270 visits this year. Around 800 members are notified each month about future events, activities and news. You too can sign up to be kept informed. We have 1400 followers on Facebook and NFBP has 2394. The blog which is part of the website gives regular updates and pictures of our activities and has had 2430 views this year. From Sept 2021 "Wirral's Wild 50 nature notes" were sent monthly to all Eco Schools to provide a year's worth of nature inspiration and they are also available on the website.

Margaret Jackson our Secretary makes a notable contribution by ensuring that very detailed reports are produced and circulated ahead of meetings and that the minutes are produced rapidly thereafter. Her long experience and knowledge is invaluable to us all.

Gillian Lacy, Hon Treasurer, keeps our finances under scrutiny and is taking action to introduce a card payment system at our events as many have asked for that option.

Hilary Ash, our Honorary Conservation Officer in addition to completing consultations to Government provides copious advice to many voluntary and statutory organisations on wildlife and conservation matters. She is heavily committed to New Ferry Butterfly Park and also runs botanical courses on grasses etc. She liaises with such bodies as the Tree Wardens and takes an active part in wildlife recording. Her contribution is outstanding and is recognised across Wirral and beyond.

Paul Loughnane BEM, Secretary of NFBP and of WCV is an active dynamic conservator, scything, hedge laying and coppicing as he goes. A natural engager with people and a stalwart of the committee. Our volunteer leaders are having their First Aid certificates and training updated.

Caroline Smallthwaite continues to make a great contribution by her scrutiny of all Wirral Planning Applications from a strictly wildlife perspective. She has, for example, requested badger conditions, preliminary roost assessments, Ecological Impact assessments, bat surveys, tree protection plans, and for biodiversity gain of 10% to be demonstrated.

Sally Walsh arranges and coordinates our programme of speakers for which we are most grateful.

Ron Warne, our Recording Officer, who is also involved with the Friends of Dibbinsdale, oversees the work of our Recorders which is a key function in conservation work. Many of them have a botanical background but if you have skills in biology, zoology, invertebrates, marine issues, or anything else, and would like to engage please come forward. We would love to help you to follow your interest.

John McGaw has taken on the voluntary role of Warden at Cleaver Heath, which is most pleasing. He runs regular work parties. He is an accomplished spider man who entertains us all at Open Days and other events by exhibiting his specimens. He is welcome to attend our committee.

Special mention must be made of Mike Maher a former committee member who now produces a wonderful array of plants which are sold to raise much needed funds for us at NFBP from open day onwards. His engaging personality and wide knowledge have led people to volunteer with us.

John Gill continues to provide demanding quizzes during the year both to raise funds and to stimulate the grey matter. Please have a go as you could win a prize. We sent his Lake District one to Cumbria WT and wonder if they won it.

It is good to welcome Dr Sheila Ross a retired ecologist back after some years away. She has joined our recording team.

Your committee has met ten times mainly by Zoom but has escaped to Lees Lane Ponds and to New Ferry BP to keep us in touch with reality and to savour the high quality conservation being undertaken. As always we receive the most comprehensive reports from committee members ahead of the meetings which

detail our range of activities. We thank Sarah Bennett for her help over so many years and wish her well as she develops the “Our Dee Estuary” project. We are pleased that Kellie Barnard has joined us as our link with CWT and we are all thankful for the input and support from trustees and other team members at Bickley.

We thank you for your support which remains vital if we are to continue to stand up for nature in Wirral. We realise that many people face acute financial uncertainty but whatever happens the sun will still shine and solace and relief can be found in the glories of the natural world which you can access locally both in our reserves and in our local estuaries with their awe inspiring wildlife spectacles.

Take the long view, we are all made of nuclear waste dating back from the dawn of the universe five billion years ago and accumulated from stars which have formed and expired during that time span. Perhaps we should be more careful with our own industrial nuclear waste as you never know what might emerge from it after several billion years.

Stephen R. Ross

Chairman of Wirral Wildlife Group.