

Lavell's Wetland Trust Newsletter 2018/19

Farewell F.O.L.L.

A belated Happy New year to all our members, this short newsletter is just to mark the fact that we will no longer be having winter AGM's due to the formation of Lavell's Wetland Trust in July 2018. A summer LWT AGM venue, date and time will be announced in spring.

I do want to reflect on the amazing work of so many dedicated people, over our 30 years as a charity and the earlier years before Lavell's even existed.

A brief review of our history

In 1982 a handful of people conceived the idea that there should be somewhere wildlife could thrive, where the general public could not freely wander around and scare everything off and where habitats for dabbling ducks and waders would be created, managed and protected.

Sandford Lake had the first hide in 1982, but there was also this quiet, bare new gravel pit on the North of Sandford Lane, we imaginatively called 'North Sandford'. This would be the place. In the meantime Sandford got most of the attention, islands were cleared, gravel brought in and Common Terns quickly took up summer residence, as did Redshank, Lapwing and Little-ringed Plovers and had a little success. Gadwall were proven breeding in 1983 and quickly became the best breeding site in the county with 4-5 pairs over the next few years.

1984 and Teal scrape was dug and Teal hide was built, but one year later Wokingham District Council announced it would be putting in a new footpath alongside it. We objected, but the path went ahead anyway, so to spite them we planned and dug Tern Scrape in 1987, designed with a more open aspect to attract more waders and Bitterns. Sandford kept going as a Tern colony, but the now 'Lavell's Lake' attracted good birds from day one...most will know that the very weekend after excavation of 'Tern scrape ended 30th August 1987, a Wilson's Phalarope appeared for just 2 hours and 10 minutes and set expectations high from then on. As many will also know the 87' Hurricane would come just 6 weeks later and this brought Grey Phalarope, Sabine's Gull.

Many species went locally extinct by the nineties - Grey Partridge, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer, with Spotted Flycatcher just a passage species since the eighties.

Various improvements and adjustments were made to Lavell's through the 1990's, but when I became chair in 2000 it was immediately clear the original habitat intentions had been lost over time, many 80 foot Poplars dominated the skyline and waders were rare.

I set out an abrupt and to some an alarming tree felling programme, but by 2002 Bitterns were again being seen and have been annual since. Since 2005 we have increased Phragmites reed beds by 1000%, and keep a year round feeding station. Cutting significant sections of the reeds each Autumn has led to many Snipe, regular Jack Snipe, highly visible Water Rail and increased in Teal.

In 2006 we negotiated access to view Lea Farm Lake and then got permission to build our 'Ron Bryant Hide' in 2010, which betters all other hides in Berkshire, if not further afield. We dug the SW corner in 2014 and that has been hailed a phenomenal success, attracting many waders, egrets and wildfowl.

Fast forward to 2017 and Ron made his intention known that he would rather buy Lea Farm Lake and give it to F.O.L.L. than see Summerleaze Ltd sell it. And as we already know F.O.L.L. could not receive such a gift, so we had to form a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) – so Lavell's Wetland Trust was born July 2018.

While all this has been going on Thames Water gave us a grant of £15,750.00 which we have put to great use, improving Lavell's Tern scrape, building new fencing, lowering even more tall trees, rebuilding the bund as it was designed in 1987, but adding lovely wet grass meadow and 140 metres more of Phragmites reed bed and installing a renewable energy solar powered water pump to irrigate the scrape each summer – to keep it attractive to all our important breeding species and a few passage ones too.

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December and Ron is about to complete the Lea Farm Lake purchase, but this is just the beginning of our new era, our dreams are bigger than ever and we will be building more hides, creating more reed beds and an even greater area for waders, Bitterns, egrets, rails, wildfowl and all the exciting passage species.

We only hope we can encourage you all to stay with us for the long haul, to see the dreams unfold, the facilities grow and only get even better and we hope you enjoy the wildlife and birds because there are going to be lots of them to see.

Overview of the birds of 2018 – Visit www.lavells.org.uk & <https://www.facebook.com/foll.org.uk>

What a mind blowing year 2018 was, passing the all time year list and finishing on 142 species. There were plenty of top birds and the bird of the year was in hot contention late in to the year.

January started as 2017 finished, with Hawfinch taking centre stage each day, 1 Bittern at WSL, Stonechat's continued overwintering at Lea Farm landfill, the odd Brambling turned up at Bittern hide feeders, 2 Woodcock started appearing at dusk from 13th, a Jack Snipe appeared 3rd Feb (Jack Jones), again 5th, but 2/24th, then 4/25th and 5/26th breaking park records twice in 24 hours. A Brent Goose showed up Feb 6th remaining nearly 3 weeks, Med Gull from 24th was hard to connect with, a Smew frustrated many of us only showing for Tim James near dusk Feb 28th. The Hawfinch scene was still wowing locals with 5/10th, 9/24th, 1-3 most days on and off.

March 1st brought a few inches of snow and a flurry of exciting species, 7 Dunlin and 3 Ruff huddled together on the Sandford's old tern island, 1 Golden Plover on the landfill, later a rather mobile group of **3-15 Pintail**, then a long staying Black-necked Grebe on BSL, from 3rd (MFW) till 13th. The first migrant Chiffchaff 14th, then a male Merlin perched on the landfill for nearly 10 minutes 17th (FJC) a Red-legged Partridge 22nd remained on the landfill for several days. Then 2 Little Gulls 26th over North, the first 'predictable' migrants came in the form of Willow Warbler 30th, then 4 Sand Martin and a Wheatear 31st.

April started with 4 Pintail over 3rd, then 2 more Little Gull 8th (BTB & FJC), then our 8th **Great White Egret**, over BSL low 9th (FJC & MFW), but the real good stuff came at the end of the month, a Goshawk over 21st (Jo Taylor), a **Wood Warbler 28th** by the weir West of Sandford (Jo Taylor et al), then 7 Arctic Terns 29th, **2 Whimbrel** on 30th at LFL most of the morning (FJC et al).

May wasn't up to the same standards, but Greenshank 5th, Ringed Plover 21st, 3 Black Tern 27th were all good to catch up with. June brought more excitement at the end of the month, Red Crested Pochard 27th (BTB et al), Garganey 28th (FJC et al), then 2 Common Crane seen flying over from the South by I Paine while driving near Winnersh Triangle, we expected to be bird of the year.



Black Tern



Wood Warbler – Dave Rimes

July – had a few bits and pieces, but only 8 Black-tailed Godwit raised the heart beat in any way. **August** didn't really deliver either, Whinchat was as always nice and rather expected at LFL these days, Spotted Flycatcher again relief they still drop in, a Linnet was the hardest to see of all.

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September – 1st another Black-necked Grebe (BTB), light Yellow Wagtail passage, Pintail 10th, then yet another great find for Jo Taylor at Mortimer's Meadow on the 12th in the form of an autumn **Pied Flycatcher**, unheard of in the county on the whole, but it stayed 2-3 days and kept company with 2-3 Spotted Flycatcher at times.

October – Just when you thought it would quieten down, a 'Tern sp' 6th (SPD), a Firecrest 15th (N Keightly), but then only the second ever **Yellow-browed Warbler** appeared 24th at Sandford (FJC), staying for 10 days and attracted over 100 visitors. In the meantime a Yellow-legged Gull 27th (Jo Taylor), Great White Egret over Lavell's 29th (Richard Marsh), Curlew 29th (R Stansfield et al), kept us busy elsewhere on the park.

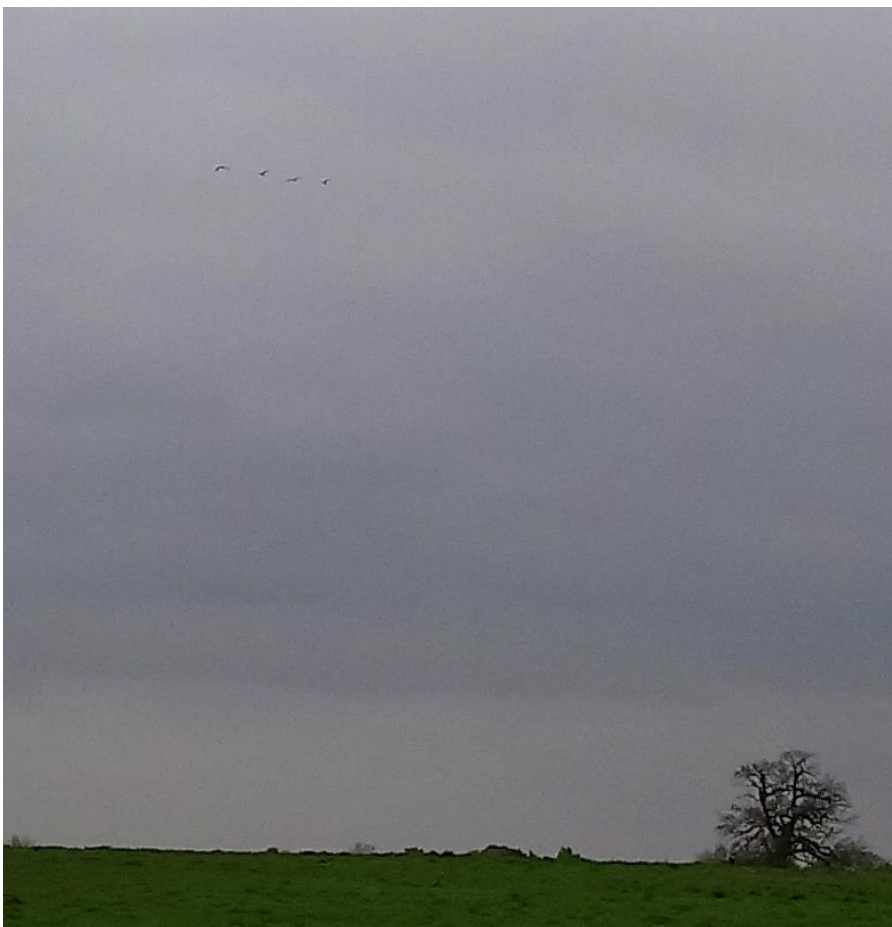


Yellow-browed Warbler - Gav Turner



Grey Phalarope – Steve Day

November – But still it wasn't over, Steve Day finding a **Grey Phalarope** on 1st at Tern scrape, sadly only staying for about 11 minutes. The Yellow-browed Warbler showed 2nd at 15:30 and was never seen again. The 4th saw another Merlin, this time in over Sandford then West on the 4th (FJC) and not to be outdone by Ian Paine's record, the work party group witnessed **4 Common Crane** flying over gracefully North on the 28th.



4 Common Crane - FJC

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Monthly Species Count

86 in January, = 3rd with 2012, 16 & 17
92 in February, = 2nd with 2012
104 in March, New 1st place beating 2016 by 4
108 in April, = 3rd with 2016
92 in May, = 4th with 2007, 14, 15 & 16
90 in June, = 2nd with 2016
94 in July, = 2nd with 2013
94 in August, 2 below 2017
95 in September, = 6th with 2008 & 2011
90 in October, = 7th with 2009
82 in November, = 7th with 2009
80 in December, = 10th with 2014

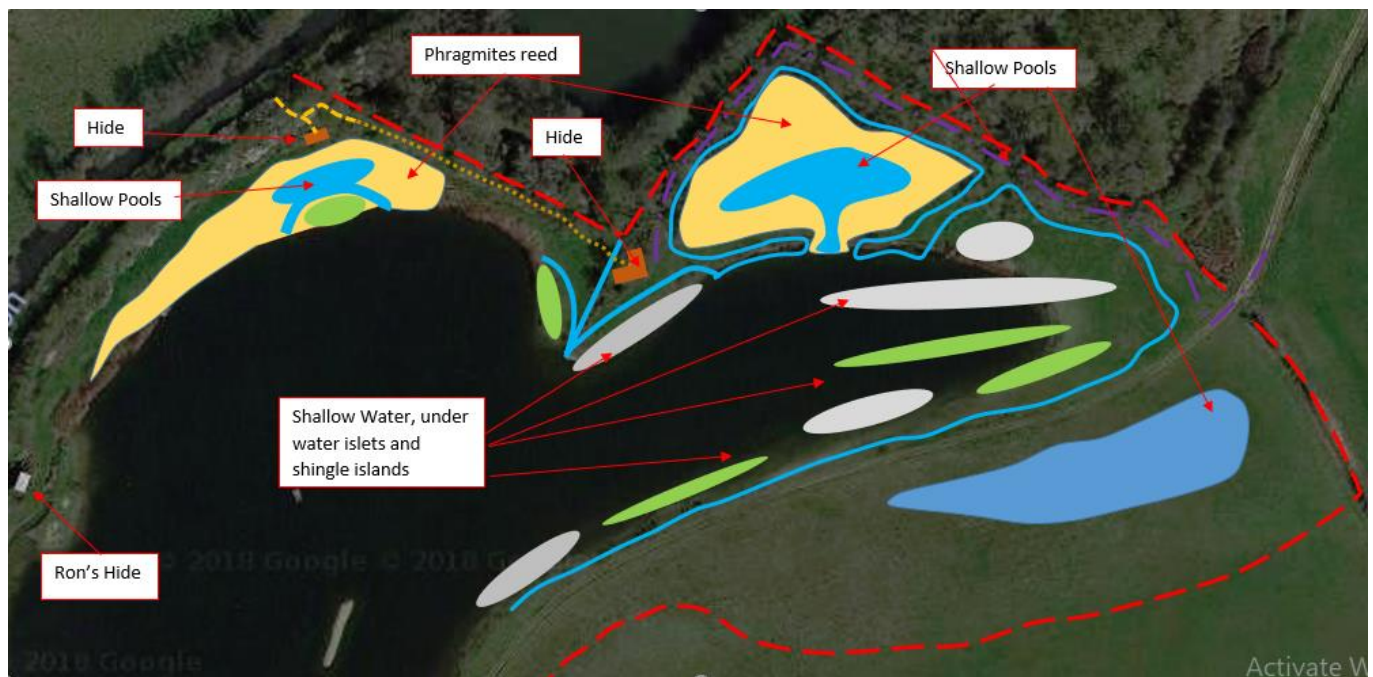
Monthly Running Total

92, new 4th place over 2002, 03, 08 & 13
106, = 2nd with 2012
126, new 2nd place beating 2016 by 1
129, = 3rd with 2016
132, = 2nd with 2017
133, = 2nd with 2003 & 2017
136, = 2nd with 2017
137, = 3rd with 2016
141, = 1st with 2012 & 2017
142 = 1st place with 2012
142 = 1st place with 2012

The unfolding vision

Lots of changes lie ahead, LWT is working on how we grow a bigger audience and membership, our plans are bold, inspired and big! We are working on these plans, applying for grants to fund the habitats our birds need and the facilities and hides we know and our members would love.

Here is an artistic impression of the NW and NE corners as we are planning, most likely the work will begin in August 2020. The dotted yellow line is a proposed new raised path, leading to a small hide overlooking reed bed pools in the NW corner, then 120m down to a substantial hide on stilt legs overlooking the whole NE bay and East shore, overlooking 2-3 large shingle islands and many islets like the SW corner. The hide will be set high up so we can look down into the reed bed main pool where we are expecting Bitterns, Egrets, Water Rail and many Snipe in the cut reed. The pools in the landfill edge of for grazing duck and waders, the islands for Common Tern, Redshank, Little-ringed Plover, Lapwing and Oystercatcher, hopefully some Gadwall and Shelduck too. The roof of main hide will have a viewing area to sky watch and observe the landfill and whole lake area.



Keep watching the Facebook Group to keep up with events and sightings, but if you are not on WhatsApp, you are missing out on up to the minute news.

The next steps will be to secure a tenancy of approximately 200m of the landfill beyond our Eastern boundary so we can stop the sheep farming disturbing our winter birds and remain influencers over long term development plans that could arise in 15-20 years time after the methane stops.