

## **Lavell's Wetland Trust (LWT) AGM Newsletter 2020**

### **Message from Jane Campbell**

Our Annual General Meeting planned for 16th June 2020 had to be postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions. Our constitution allows us to hold it later in the year so if regulations are relaxed, we will arrange a new date and let you know well in advance.

Sadly, our hide has to remain closed but rest assured we will open it as soon as it is safe to do so. The good news is work parties will restart soon and communications will be sent asking for volunteers to book a space. We have to control and limit the number of people working together and have a full set of Covid-19 measures in place to keep everyone safe.

It has been good to see our WhatsApp chats used so extensively over the last few months; do ask if you want to be added to them as it's a bargain at only £2 per year.

Our exciting news that LWT now manages Lea Farm and of our development plans for the site were recently communicated and I hope you find the following reports of the last year interesting.

### **Financial report from Phil Kinch**

2019 was the first full year for LWT. Our funds at the year-end, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, were £29,186 which included Gift Aid claims to December 2018. The 2019 claim for a further £750 was submitted and settled by HMRC in January 2020.

Income from members in 2019 – subscriptions, donations, bird news and bird walks – was similar to the total for 2018 (LWT and FOLL combined) and this was supplemented by £275 from the Waitrose “green token” scheme and £190 from talks (by Fraser) to several bodies.

Aside from our normal operating costs, our major expenditures were

- £636 for work on final elements of the Lavell's Lake improvement project, funded by Thames Water in 2017.
- £660 survey costs associated with taking on the Lea Farm site.
- £2,740 relating to EA permission and the planning application for the project at Lea Farm to create a large additional wetland area around the lake. Most of those costs will be reimbursed in 2020, thanks to the support we will receive from the Trust for Oxfordshire Environment and with generous funding from the Network Rail's “No Net Loss of Biodiversity on the Greater West” Programme.

Our funds at the end of 2019 are very healthy but we do expect a fall of around £10,000 by the end of 2020 – assuming restrictions associated with the Covid19 outbreak do not delay our plans. Major items will include legal fees of around £3,000 to formally accept the Lea Farm lake site, we will be funding elements of the project at Lea Farm ourselves and we plan to install a new owl box, for which one of our supporters raised almost £700 in 2018.

Nevertheless, our funds will still be well above the level of reserves we try to maintain to cover unforeseen events and emergencies and we will be using them for further essential tasks (such as repairing / improving the tern rafts, which has been delayed because of Covid19).

In the coming months we have a number of projects to fund.

- Lea Farm lake hide needs new weather proof cladding on the East and South facing sides

- New Barn Owl box, post and webcam
- New security signs and gates inside our land
- Promotional materials – Information board, banner and awareness/fund raising pop up stall

Not included in the figures is the Network Rail money in and the costs of delivering the project and it is expected we will use some of our reserves to deliver certain elements falling outside the scope of the funding.

The final land transfer, which is expected soon, is the footpath and river bank. This hopefully will provide income from leasing the fishing rights to an angling club, also several large fish in Lea Farm Lake if caught could attract around £1,000 into our coffers, so we will no doubt pursue this.

### **Membership update from Les Blundell**

With access to Lavell's and Lea Farm being restricted by flooding and then the hides being closed we have had very few new members, year on year to May we saw a drop from 439 to 420 memberships, 50/50 split of individuals and families not renewing. On the upside, we have 182 WhatsApp subscribers to LWT Bird News (LBN) offering a valuable service and creating an income source that keeps on growing.

### **Site report from Fraser Cottingham**

#### **Effect of Covid-19 - The bad news**

Covid-19 affected everyone and for LWT, this meant closed car parks, lay-bys and public hides with LWT having to follow suit with the closing of the Ron Bryant hide at Lea Farm lake, but I am not sure anyone could have foreseen Wokingham Council's decision to close pedestrian access into Sandford. The only pedestrian route from the North then became through Lavell's and this had a significant negative impact, our footfall sky rocketed and over the next 3 months numerous holes were ripped through the hedgerow along Sandford Lane, leading to DPCS needing to carry out many quick fix fencing jobs. DPCS also had to deal with poachers, but it seems the biggest change is now that since lock down was relaxed a proportion of the general public appear to have lost their grasp on what is acceptable behaviour. The DAC 'beach' has been closed to due to bar-b-q's and people open water swimming. Our car park field has become a picnic field, with noisy families playing stickball with dogs, frisbee and flying kites. Worst of all someone has cut 4 gaps into the hedgerow alongside Lea Farm Lake and used weed killer on the vegetation, no doubt so they can see while the hide remains closed.

#### **Effect of Covid-19 - The good news**

As we all know it has been a very warm spring, this has allowed many birds to thrive and have a mostly undisturbed opportunity to get on with it and across the park there are families of Mute Swans, goslings are everywhere. Oystercatchers bred on BSL's Goat island, we have Sand Martins using both our walls, with Teal scrape wall being used for the first time in 10 years – a significant 40+ pairs too. Skylarks have bred on the landfill, huge flocks of Long-tailed Tits can be found, Gadwall have just been found with 2 young on Lavell's and thanks to some great timing by Ron Bryant and Alan Rymer the second raft went out at exactly the right time and we have about 23 pairs of Common Tern happily nesting and screaming at each other every waking moment.



Along the Loddon Grey Wagtail bred, Kingfisher is around as usual, Little Egrets never stopped visiting and a good smattering Swift visit each day over BSL. With it being so warm the water level at Lea Farm Lake is perfect, providing shallow water and exposing mud, this has led to early Green Sandpipers finding us, with Little-ringed Plover, Redshank and Lapwing all present on and off and looking interested in making a late nesting attempt if they can pair up and shake off the Jackdaws.

#### **Volunteering**

Attendance at the end of 2019 was outstanding, a record 37 people turning out for the September date and we average 21 all year. Excessive flooding Nov to March stopped most work in 2020 and Covid-19 blew us away since. We hope to announce some smaller work parties in the very near future, not least to prepare for the Network Rail site preparation work required before we bring in the diggers in August.

#### **Management Plans**

Subject to meeting any Covid related restrictions we will be going ahead with the Network Rail project from mid August, beginning with our largest ever excavation project to create our largest Phragmites reed bed and largest marsh at Lea Farm Lake.

#### **Growth, Fund raising, Appeals & Corporate Sponsorship**

I am behind with my commitment to increase our membership to 500, but once we can move forward we will invest in a banner and stand equipment so volunteers can help us promote LWT, advertise membership and appeal for donations at local retailers. I would like to hear from you if you can offer 2 hours per month to be a donation collector, or help in another capacity to promote LWT.

#### **Website, Social Media & WhatsApp FOLL Bird News Group**

We have had a complete refresh of our website, our homepage now a 'Latest News' window on the home page so it is much simpler to find out what is going on at a glance, it also offers direct content feeds from our Facebook Group, our Twitter account and my own YouTube channel as a temporary measure until we get our own Barn Owl box in and select the best way to get video clips streamed. Our WhatsApp bird news group is always growing, 182 members now subscribe to the £2.00 a year up to the minute LWT Bird News service. If you are not on WhatsApp, send your news by email [info@lavells.org.uk](mailto:info@lavells.org.uk) Please keep sharing at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1662435990723770/>

#### **The vision**

The developments for the NW to NE corners are going to make a massive impact on the appeal to waders, ducks, Herons, Bitterns, Egrets, warblers, wagtails, Water Rail, passage waders in spring and autumn will have a choice of where best to feed and rest, so we are likely to see more and birds should stay longer. I will be focused on growing our membership to 500+, adding value and then it's onwards to 1,000. The whole time my message will be about getting our average subscription and donation to £20 per family, with the aim of extending our Lea farm nature reserve northwards to include Lodge Wood Lake and eastwards to include the adjacent grassland to protect more of the beautiful Loddon Valley.

*It only takes having a dream to begin the journey.*

**Overview of the birds of 2020 so far** – Visit <http://lavells.org.uk/latest-sightings/>

With 2019 being another amazing year I always have high hopes and have rarely been disappointed... except this year. So we've had lots of flooding on and off for the first 2 months, then we got in about 3 weeks before lockdown and then virtually nobody about for obvious reasons. But it wasn't all bad....

**January** – The usual 1st January day brought everything we've come to expect, including Peregrine, Stonechat, Barn and Tawny Owl, Bittern, 80+ Meadow Pipit wintering on the landfill, a Green Sandpiper 3rd (JV, ARY & GSE), the Marsh Harrier I found 29th/30th Dec was seen again by RNM on the 4th, Woodcock was near impossible to find, Shelduck 8th and 12th, a lone Goosander went over late afternoon 18th (FJC). Kestrel has become the hardest to find resident raptor, 1/19th.

**February** – Oystercatcher from 5th (RNM et al), Mediterranean Gull BSL same day (FJC), 5 Linnet over 21st (NK), 3 Stonechat from 26th.

**March** – 6 Little Grebe on the balancing pool, 3 Stonechat 6th, 3 Mandarin 10th, Great White Egret flushed from Wet Meadow 12th, 2 more Mediterranean Gull over Lavell's West 14th (FJC), Sand Martin from 17th, a really early Willow Warbler 19th, Redshank 28th LFL, White Wagtail 28th (S Power), Green Sandpiper 29th,

**April** – Great White Egret 1st heading East, also c60 Golden Plover East, 30+ Fieldfare 1st, 3 Fieldfare & 20 Redwing 3rd, Swallow from 4th, Common Tern 5th, Wheatear 5th, 1 Redwing 6th, Meadow Pipit till 7th, Green Sandpiper 8th, 3 Willow Warbler and Whitethroat from 9th, 4 Snipe 9th, Little-ringed Plover from 11th, Cuckoo from 12th, House Martin from 13th, Common Sandpiper from 15th, Sedge Warbler from 15th, Sandwich Tern silently flew in and out at LFL in the mist 16th (FJC), 2 Shelduck 16th, Reed Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat from 17th, 1 Yellow Wagtail over 18th, 3 Wheatear 18th, Garden Warbler from 19th, 3 Swift same day, Hobby 20th, a Black Tern 21st on LFL, that stayed till the 23rd, the year's rarest birds so far came on 24th when I saw 2 Cattle Egret which flew over LFL North at 06:30, but only seen from the back, so I was doubting myself.



2 Cattle Egret – Mark Lauri



Mediterranean Gull - FJC

The 25th I saw them coming head on and confirmed their identity, I spoke to a friend in Charvil and said it might be worth checking any fields with cattle. Mark walked down to the Shetland pony field and found both birds, but they flew off in minutes, but not before he got the above photograph. The question is did they roost on Dinton?

**May** – 2 Dunlin 1st , Curlew heard over 3rd , 2 Shelduck 3rd, 1 Shoveler 3rd, 1 Teal & 1 Pochard 10th, 2 LRP 11th , Common Gull 24th (very rare on date), 18-20 Common Tern 15th , a Hawfinch flew along calling over Sandford Lane West 17th (FJC). We have around 90 Herring Gull and 15 Lesser Black-backed Gull coming to loaf on LFL shingle island each day, if this continues, we have a reasonable chance of a Yellow-legged turning up amongst them in late June onwards. If it stays warm and dry the shallows have a strong possibility of attracting the Icelandic form of Black-tailed Godwit and Wood Sandpiper could drop in at any time.

**Monthly Species Counts**

86 in Jan = 4<sup>th</sup> with 12, 17 & 18  
83 in Feb = 7<sup>th</sup> with 2011  
89 in March 8<sup>th</sup> place  
102 in April = 2<sup>nd</sup> last with 2011  
94 in May, 6<sup>th</sup> place

**Monthly Running Year Totals**

89 = 7<sup>th</sup> with 2011  
94 = 2<sup>nd</sup> last with 2005  
113 - 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest year total at this date  
116 = lowest with 2005