

# Lavell's Wetland Trust (LWT) AGM Newsletter 2021

## **Notice of Annual General Meeting**

Welcome everyone to LWT's 3<sup>rd</sup> AGM newsletter, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of Lavell's Wetland Trust is to be held on 15 June 2021 at 7.30pm. A link to join the meeting will be sent a few days beforehand. Please would you email [secretary@lavells.org.uk](mailto:secretary@lavells.org.uk) if you plan to attend, saying how your name will appear on your zoom login, as we need to record attendees at the meeting.

## **Agenda for AGM**

- 1) **Apologies for absence**
- 2) **Minutes** – for approval - The minutes of AGM held 22 September 2020 are available on the LWT website <http://lavells.org.uk/about-lwt/agm-minutes-and-reports/>
- 3) **Reports:**
  - a) Treasurer – Phil Kinch:

The LWT accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 are attached as an Appendix to this newsletter. At the time of writing this, they are subject to completion of the independent examination.

Our finances reflect the charity's activities, which are covered elsewhere in this newsletter. There are always a number of changes in costs and income each year – for example we bought a lot of new tools in 2020 but less bird food. The main things that I would like to highlight are:

- We received the fantastic gift of Lea Farm Lake from Ron Bryant last year, which is now recorded in the list of LWT assets. The legal / land transfer process meant that we incurred costs of £2,264 in 2020. Transfer of the Loddon path element of Ron's gift is expected to happen in 2021.
- The excavation and fencing elements of the conservation project at Lea Farm Lake were completed despite the coronavirus restrictions. We have been able to recover all costs, so far, thanks to the grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) with funding provided by Network Rail. However, LWT will be funding some of the remaining elements of the project.
- We received £18,674 during 2020 from donations to fund the project to build a new hide at Lea Farm Lake. We decided to create a "restricted fund" to ring-fence the donations and the project costs. £15,000 came from generous donations by the Reid family and the remaining from donations through either the GoFundMe appeal or directly to LWT. As I write this, funding has now risen to almost £26,000 thanks to £5,000 in "matching funding" from Microsoft and further generous donations by members.
- Income from our members through subscriptions, other donations and bird news subscriptions all increased which is wonderful in light of all that happened in 2020.
- Our general fund increased from £29,186 at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 to £34,716 at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. This increase has only come about because a number of the things originally planned for 2020 have been delayed and will be done as soon as we can. These include:
  - Other elements of the Lea Farm Lake project – chainsaw equipment & training, tree pollarding
  - Transfer of the Loddon Path to LWT
  - Maintenance work at Ron's hide
  - New owl box and signs at Lea Farm Lake yet to be installed

Had we managed to do everything as planned, the fund would have gone down.

- We have recognised that we have more assets to maintain and replace now that we have responsibility for everything at Lea Farm Lake. We can't expect to simply fund some of the major items from ongoing income as and when they arise so we have decided that, starting in 2021, we will set aside a sum each year to build up a fund to cover them.

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### b) Membership – Les Blundell. Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020

Membership held up well during 2020 considering members restrictions to access our lakes due to weather Covid-19 lockdowns. We had a modest increase in membership of 6, split evenly between Individual and Family memberships.

At the end of the year we had 239 Individual memberships, 142 Family memberships and 69 Life members. Counting a Family as 2 members, we had 612 members.

### c) Countryside Service Ranger Report – Simon Bartlam

#### i. **Management Tasks – Some tasks remain slowed due to Covid-19**

Hay/Grass cutting Teal & Tern Meadows and grazing were planned for late August, but we decided to bring the horses in to both meadows in May and are currently setting out Butterfly friendly areas. Ride Management at the back of Lavell's and main island is planned for August, like LWT we plan to adopt a larger scale reed cutting programme in the coming 1-3 years. Significant path degradation from the huge increase in footfall post lockdown has led to many illegal paths being created to bypass the very muddy areas, various restrictions on path materials have made the repairs a slow process. Tree management – Felling and 'pruning' will increase in the Autumn, Southern Electric will be back late 2021 to once again cut the trees under the wires running parallel with Sandford Lane, we share LWT's view they need to better manage the tree cutting process and pollard whole trees not half of them

#### ii. **General Rangering**

General work including cutting back path vegetation, litter picking – post lockdown a significant increase in littering has been experienced across DPCS park areas, additionally swimming and illegal bar-b-q's remain an issue. Fly-tipping in the laybys continues and are a highways issue, report incidents at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/roadworks-and-outdoor-maintenance/report-a-problem-with-roads-and-streets/fly-tipping/>

Lavell's car park is opened daily while the new DAC is constructed. Hide vandalism has dropped this year, but a steep increase in parties and subsequent rubbish, we have not assessed the disturbance to wildlife and seek a better solution working with local police, community and other groups

#### iii. **Volunteer involvement** – Resuming summer 2021 all volunteer group activities were postponed during lockdown, some have resumed, as always thanks go to the members of LWT for all their hard work

### 4) Election of Officers & Committee - Officers standing down/re-election

LWT's constitution requires a third of the trustees to retire at each AGM. The following trustees will retire and are standing for re-election;

- Phil Kinch
- Ron Bryant

### Notes

1. **The present officers & committee;** Chair – Jane Campbell, Secretary – Angela Gunn, Treasurer – Phil Kinch, Chief Visionary Officer – Fraser Cottingham, Les Blundell, Ron Bryant, Renton Righelato. Committee, Bob Bennett, Peter Scudamore, Keith Boseley
2. **The committee is always open to offers from members willing to help in a specific area.** If you want to volunteer your service please email [secretary@lavells.org.uk](mailto:secretary@lavells.org.uk) or post to LWT c/o Dinton Pastures Country Park, Davis Street, Hurst, Reading, RG10 0TH with details of the skills you are offering.
3. **If subscriptions are in arrears, members are not entitled to vote at the AGM**

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### **5) Chair's Report : Jane Campbell**

2021 has offered a light at the end of the tunnel. The Zoom committee meetings worked well, and we also held additional, subject-focussed virtual meetings which helped us to speed up decision making and respond quickly to matters arising.

The conservation project at Lea Farm has mostly been delivered, the follow-on planting has begun, and tree work will commence in autumn 2021. This was made possible with a grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) with funding provided by Network Rail. This funding provides for two LWT volunteers to be trained for chainsaw use and this will be actioned when restrictions allow.

Whenever possible, Covid-19 secure work parties went ahead on the normal Sunday volunteer days, plus various others were held to finish the work at Lea Farm. It's good to see our monthly bird walks have restarted and thanks go to Peter Scudamore for leading them. Our fabulous volunteers continued to turn up all year and we are happy to see many new faces amongst the regulars.

As always, we are indebted to Simon Bartlam who on top of everything he always does, has been incredibly helpful in planning and delivering all-important Crassula spraying, tree work and fencing. Thanks must also go to Summerleaze Ltd, in particular Ken Swan for his onsite vigilance and to the farmer Derek Potter for common sense help and access arrangements.

LWT's committee has worked hard as always. Phil Kinch is once again on top of our finances and projections; Angela Gunn is an efficient secretary who keeps us all in line; Renton Righelato 'smashed it out of the park' on Network Rail; Bob Bennett handled the latest bird news and photographs; Peter Scudamore has led our bird walks and many work parties; Ron Bryant is always there with practical skills; Les Blundell manages our membership; and Fraser Cottingham continues to inspire both the committee, our members, local groups and anyone he comes into contact with, but deserves extra thanks for bringing about a hugely successful fund raising initiative for the new restricted access hide at Lea Farm. Currently standing at almost £26,000, this could not have been done without The Reid Family, Microsoft and many of our members who have donated so generously.

### **Habitat Management, Work Parties & Events - Achievements – Fraser Cottingham**

- Ron & Alan serviced the rafts again, all Black-headed Gulls on one, the second had 14+ pairs of Common Terns, producing around 20-30 chicks.
- DPCS plans to work with LWT on the whole area around Teal scrape to promote more scrub vegetation, this requires some young Ash and other trees to be cut to help the bramble and Blackthorn restore itself.
- Keith Bosely our new work party and habitat management officer is driving stock proof fencing our footpath boundaries, getting the best out of our shrub planting and habitat plans.
- Peter Scudamore will resume with CROW and still manages guided walks.
- About 20 pairs of Sand Martins are in occupation of the LFL wall, as are 20+ used the old Teal wall.
- Repairs to Ron's hide are planned this late summer.
- Install a 'landfill observation area' at the bottom of the car park field July/Aug this year.
- The sluice door in the ditch adjacent to Teal scrape, not yet repaired
- Thames Water Habitat Improvement Grant – A few remaining items
  - Posting and fencing the new reed bed and transplanting Phragmites rhizomes
  - Planting will recommence September for 3 years
  - Levelling off the ground by the new screening
- Network Rail – The excavation done, we are seeing the first spring if the birds we are seeing are an indication, then we have never had White or Yellow Wagtails linger, Common Sandpiper are also staying longer, more islands may be encouraging Lapwing, Little-ringed Plover and Oystercatcher to all think about attempting to breed – any that even try is a major change for the positive. We do have reed to transplant for 3 years to ensure we have a major reed bed in that timescale, after which we must invest in cutting equipment to usher in huge increases in Snipe and Teal, as well as Bittern in the uncut sections

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### Management Plans

- Cattle grazing will be looked at to manage Willow scrub
- Still to arrange is organised islands vegetation cutting regime on Sandford
- Path repair and protection on Sandford's islands from flooding and a proper sluice
- A dialogue with the farmer may lead to an organic wild flower meadow around the landfill, we hope to encourage more Skylarks and finches in the winter
- We will be planting Gorse along part of our boundary at Lea Farm Lake in an effort to offer a breeding habitat for Linnet, possibly even Stonechat

**2021 Dawn Chorus Bird Walk** – Again cancelled due to uncertainty of lock down measures, perhaps we can arrange a New Year Walk and a Spring Dawn Chorus in 2022.

### Snapshot of birding so far in 2021

January began with all the usual expected birds, 2 Pintail 4<sup>th</sup>, 4/5<sup>th</sup> were a lovely surprise, Woodcock and Med Gulls were also seen early in the month, Shelduck, Golden Plover and Stonechat were seen in February, but an amazingly early Wheatear 22<sup>nd</sup> was unprecedented, although part of a warm air surge that week.

That warm air was short lived, Jack Snipe 1<sup>st</sup>, then a big surprise in the form of 4 Barnacle Geese 3<sup>rd</sup> March, a Goosander flying East 22<sup>nd</sup> was a way off the park. Cold air dominated but first Sand Martins arrived 22<sup>nd</sup>, Swallow 26<sup>th</sup>, 5 Wheatear 29<sup>th</sup>, 3 Willow Warbler same day. April was dominated by the same North winds and whilst clear it was cold all month, not without events though, Curlew and more Med Gulls 4<sup>th</sup>, Yellow Wagtail and an Osprey 8<sup>th</sup>, first Cuckoo and a pair of Common Scoter over 9<sup>th</sup>, a stunning male Redstart 13<sup>th</sup>, Little Gull and the first Common Tern 19<sup>th</sup>, then the wonderful news a Nightingale was singing at Mortimer's Meadow 24<sup>th</sup> onwards, then a second at Lavell's from early May.

May also led to a flurry of passage waders, Greenshank 2<sup>nd</sup>, Dunlin and only our 5<sup>th</sup> ever Sanderling on 4<sup>th</sup>, 2 Grey Plover 6<sup>th</sup>, but the biggest rarity of the year may have already happened when a Hooded Crow turned up 9<sup>th</sup> May, the first in Berkshire since 1980. The park's year count stands at a healthy 125 species for 2021 so far.



Hooded Crow



Sanderling

### Future Vision – Fraser Cottington

The commitment to increasing our membership to 500 has still been slow so far in 2021, but we are about to deploy an 'A' Frame during work parties and have a person sat manning a table to act as spokesperson for the morning, their job being to interface with everyone walking by, offer a leaflet where applicable and the idea of using a QR code so that they can photograph it and download the app, or even join on the spot is being looked at.

A huge increase in footfall past Lavell's and Lea Farm Lake offers us the chance to pick up new members, as must the new DAC building and I am in discussions with DPCS & DAC managers to install fencing at both the DAC beach and picnic/duck feeding areas, to prevent the dog intrusions and attacks on wildfowl young that occur every year.

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The neighbouring Lodge Wood Lake is still on our radar as an area we need to manage, or ideally own to really make a difference, as stated before my vision is to;

- Create our own 10-15 space car park - subject to vehicle access terms yet to be discussed
- Create an assembly point and outdoor eating space
- Excavate shallow pools in the East side of the land
- Install strategic boardwalks and pond dipping points
- Build viewing screens in the centre overlooking the new pools and North end of the lake
- Build a Tower Hide at the South end overlooking Lea Farm Lake's whole North East bay
- Have a private gate onto the Loddon footpath near the existing Bailey bridge

### Events and Activities

Once the above is established, build a barn/outbuildings, plus an organic toilet to host a mixture of quarterly and special events and activities including;

- Schools and other group visits, days out and wildlife experiences
- Bookable family wildlife experiences
  - Pond dipping, bug hunts, mini beast walks
  - Junior work parties, bush craft skills
  - Moth trapping, bat watching, nights out under the stars
  - Guided walks, birds, insects, etc.

### Awareness & Fund Raising - A member of the Trustees (me to start with)

- To visit schools and groups doing awareness
  - The Barn Owl box webcam
  - 'Sell' the membership and family engagement activities

In addition LWT should commit to;

- Fund raising at local stores and other fund raising events
- Attend local and in particular, Woodley Summer and Christmas Carnivals at a rough cost £29.00 each – Promoting membership, etc. would get us seen by many hundreds of people

### Website, Social Media & WhatsApp LWT Bird News (LBN)

Our WhatsApp bird news group is now 204 (183 May 2020) of our members paying £2.00 a year for up to the minute Bird News. 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/>

### Greenway plans

The proposed 'Greenway' running past Lavell's and Lea Farm Lake was raised again. WBC stated they may well go ahead and use their right to resurface the old path 2m wide path, but LWT and Summerleaze Ltd have firmly objected to a 3m wide path.

### Lea Farm Project

Late in the summer the first of 3 tree pollarding and cutting phases will be carried out behind Teal Scrape, this is to link the two shallow areas. We will continue the work using our own resources. We do plan to lower much of the vegetation around the scrape to improve visibility. Our own information signs along the footpath are going in this summer.

### New restricted access hide

The hide appeal has raised almost £26,000. This is thanks to the Reid family and our friend at Microsoft who enabled the £5,000 match funding scheme to help us, as well as GoFundMe, funding via CAF and all the generous members who have given so much. We are in the final stages of getting quotations and finding contractors to help build it, but as time has rolled on, we are likely to see construction of the foundations this autumn, but the hide may not be completed until May or June 2022. When completed, it will offer unparalleled views of our largest reed bed and marsh. You can still donate <https://www.gofundme.com/f/fraser039s-campaign-for->

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[lavell039s-wetland-trust](http://lavell039s-wetland-trust), via the donate button on the LWT website or by cheque / transfer into our bank account

### **The vision**

As I said before it's all coming together, the post excavation planting of the NE & NW corners are underway, everyone will soon be enjoying more Water Rail, Snipe, Jack Snipe, Teal, Bittern, Egrets in winter, we hope to have breeding Lapwing, Redshank, maybe even Little-ringed Plover and so many more passage waders spring and autumn.

With Summerleaze saying they hope to offload Lodge Wood and Lodge Wood Lake within 5 years, we hope to arrive at agreeable terms to buy the land, obviously if we can find a benefactor to buy it like Ron did with Lea Farm Lake, this will help no end.

**A.O.B.**

Date of next meeting 21 June 2022