

ANNUAL REPORT FOR AGM OF NAILSEA ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE TRUST

2019 marked the 10th anniversary of NEWT's ownership and management of Moorend Spout Nature Reserve.

In that time we have carried out regular maintenance tasks according to the Management Plan which was set out at the start and have also conceived and initiated many new projects with the aim of increasing the biodiversity of the site and in some cases, returning that which has been lost over the years due to lack of management.

The year began with some snow in early February, but this did not prevent the usual monthly workday. A bonus of the snow was clear evidence of **Otter** foot prints in the meadow, near to the river and second pond, which confirmed their presence on site.

By mid-February, conditions were more like Summer with temperatures in double figures, which lasted until the end of the month.

Heron footprints were clearly visible in the mud around the dipping platform and our visitor could be spotted on any visit to the reserve.

We were lucky to have the benefit of aerial photographs taken from one of our volunteer's drone camera, which gave 360 degree views and clearly showed the water courses. Winter flooding made much of the reserve difficult to access and in March attempts were made to drain water away with plastic piping stretching from the ponds to the Middle Yeo.

Roe Deer became an increasingly common sight in the meadow. As many as 4 or 5 seem to be hiding out in the carr and were regularly seen scattering away across the meadow and jumping over the rivers.

An application was made to National Grid's Community Grant Programme for £2,000 to help us with improvement projects on the reserve and also to raise awareness of our group with new leaflets and interpretation boards.

We were delighted to be awarded the money in April which has to be spent on the projects outlined and within a time frame of 12 months. Progress reports were requested, but to date, have not been received.

Spring brought good numbers of the usual annual migrants such as **Chiff-Chaff** and **Whitethroat**.

Bird nesting boxes made by the Nailsea Shedders were installed in the carr area. Volunteers continue to brave the wet and muddy work of keeping the carr outflow clear, which would otherwise quickly become overgrown and blocked.

Ian records seeing a **Violet Oil Beetle**, which is listed as a target species for conservation on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

In May a party of Nailsea Scouts helped at the monthly workday to plant young Hazel and Oak trees in the meadow area adjacent to the carr and to remove huge quantities of the invasive Wild Turnip plant.

The meadow dried out, giving us hope that the drainage measures had worked.

The early warm weather gave way to a much cooler and wetter start to the summer, which may account for the poor numbers of our butterfly sightings.

2 young **Barn Owls** were seen flying away from the nest box in the middle of the day in Mid-May, but there was no evidence that they ever used the box for nesting. It is possible they were youngsters, not ready to nest and may try again this year.

At the beginning of June the meadow was again putting on a good show of **Orchids**, just in time for Open Day on 1st June. Around 70 adults and children visited throughout the day, enjoying some lovely weather, the flowers and other activities we provided. The dipping platform was an outstanding success and we gained one new volunteer from the day. Many thanks to Paul Tainton for assistance with identification and counting of butterflies, moths and dragonflies on Open Day and throughout the summer.

Dragonflies were numerous around the ponds, but butterfly numbers were still disappointingly low, a trend which continued over the rest of the summer.

Late June saw a dramatic improvement in the weather with high temperatures and a heatwave continuing on into July. It was too hot to do any recording on the reserve!

On 2nd August Hilary carried out a limited plant survey with Jenny Greenwood from Avon Wildlife Trust. She confirmed that the species which originated from the Coronation Meadows project, such as the **Birds'foot Trefoil** and **Knapweed**

were present in much greater quantities than last year. We worked out a simple plan to help with future recording.

During regular pond maintenance at the August workday, the rather large and intimidating larvae of the **Great Silver Water Beetle** was discovered! This is an aquatic insect of ditches and rhynes which is nationally rare. Our ponds are now surprising us with a much greater variety of species every year. The **Scarce Chaser** and the **Black Tailed Skimmer**, two species of Dragonfly and the **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** have also been recorded this year for the first time, although it is possible that they have just missed our attention previously.

On 6th August we welcomed a visiting group of 7 ladies from the Nailsea branch of the U3A. They were most appreciative of the efforts the volunteers had made to cut paths around the meadow for them.

At the end of August our new all colour information leaflet (funded with money from National Grid) arrived from the printers and was distributed to Nailsea Library and the Town Council Office.

In September a flock of sheep arrived on site to take care of the haycut. The grazier cut the remainder of the meadow plants which the sheep would not eat ie. the docks. Excessive scrub clearance of areas outside of the meadow must be more carefully controlled next time.

In October we were very pleased to receive an award of £455 from the Waitrose Community Matters, where the public votes for a chosen project with the green tokens supplied. This money was allocated to the purchase of much needed new tools and ordering wildflower plug plants for the meadow. We now have enough shears, loppers, rakes, forks and even gloves to enable more volunteers to work safely. We have been told that we can apply again in a year's time. The designs for the interpretation boards were completed and sent to the printers. They will be installed as soon as the ground and the weather improves sufficiently.

Heavy rain started in October and continued through November and December with out much let up, causing extensive flooding of the meadow. Little in the way of maintenance could be carried out apart from vegetation clearance of the hedgerow at the eastern boundary and it became clear that our efforts at drainage were not going to be sufficient. There appears to be a significant

blockage of the drainage system in the Jacklands Tunnel area and a contractor will have to be employed to investigate. Money for this has been allocated from the NG funding.

By the end of the month the footpath by the Spout bridge became broken down and almost impassable due to the mud and high water. A letter was written to North Somerset Council asking if repairs were likely to be carried out to the footpath and the bridge, which are in a dangerous condition. Their response was to take the unprecedented step, at the beginning of November, of issuing an emergency 3 week closure notice on the footpath from the top of Pound Lane. This is likely to be a measure to avoid any liability should an accident occur and to date, no action has been taken. We may need to take some initiative of our own to improve the access to the reserve.

At the beginning of December the volunteers continued and completed the scything of the sedges and brambles, helped by the addition of new hay forks and rakes and with a moderately successful bonfire!

The website species lists were completely revised by the end of December to include all the recordings of recent years.

The flooding problem will have to be alleviated before further work on the meadow can start but we look forward to making the further improvements of wildflower planting, nesting boxes and an insect hotel which we have planned for.

Climate change is undoubtedly driving the erratic and unpredictable weather patterns of the last year, so it is more important than ever that we aim to support our wildlife from environmental pressures, increase their habitat and allow for species to move across the landscape.

7th January 2020

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