

CROMWELL BOTTOM WILDLIFE GROUP

WINTER 2017/2018

Test your knowledge with our new wordsearch puzzle - see back page - prize for the first correct entry!

NEWSLETTER

Feature - all you ever needed to know about Sparrowhawks!

Plus The Geology of Cromwell Bottom



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR, CBWG

Welcome to the winter edition of the CBWG newsletter. It would seem that our winters are changing, they do not seem as harsh as they once were. It wasn't that long ago when snow and freezing temperatures were a regular occurrence.

The climate in the UK may be getting milder but our wildlife still needs to prepare for it. Food and shelter still have to be found if our wildlife is to survive. Ensuring that the habitats we have on the reserve are healthy is of prime importance.

One of the tasks we did in October was to cut some of the reeds in the Lagoon. By cutting channels and other open areas we create more habitat variation.

This is done every year in a different part of the reed bed as part of its ongoing management.

One of the benefits of this work is that it creates more feeding for the common Snipe that spend their winter here.

Last winter I took great delight in watching eight common Snipe in the lagoon and on previous occasions have watched the elusive Water Rail. Sights to warm anyone on a cold winter's day. Of course, the thing about winter is, you never know what might drop in or turn up. (More about this inside. Who says winter doesn't have its benefits?

Allan.

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Word Search Puzzle back page.

Front cover image credited to Allan Wolfenden - Family of Otters in Shetland Isles.



SPOTLIGHT ON OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS!

Look what our fantastic, enthusiastic volunteers have been up to this Autumn!

One long held cherished project, a sand martin wall is now up and awaiting it's new families of Sand Martins to start building nests and rearing young. Many thanks go to the Fort Foundation for their generosity in providing the money and to David Langley and Green Future Business for organising and making the wall.

The Sand Martin usually nests in tunnels they have excavated in sandy river banks but they seem to like artificial pipes in walls! Our wall has pipes filled with sand to give the Martins the opportunity to use their

natural instinct to burrow. The eggs are laid at the end of the pipe in a chamber, well away from predators.

Maintenance 'gardening' has been carried out in the lagoon area by Robin Dalton and many volunteers cutting and burning reeds to provide areas for waders.

Also on the smaller meadows the long grass was mown, raked into stacks and piled to make homes for amphibians, frogs, toads, newts and possibly grass snakes and slow worms. The short grass allows small specialist plants to grow and flower eg. corn rattle and orchids.

You can read all about what else has been achieved over the page

ARTICLE & IMAGES JANE UTTLEY



Newly erected Sand Martin Wall



The bird nesting boxes have been cleaned and records taken of the use of each box in rearing another generation of birds. During the winter months new boxes will be constructed and fastened to trees in the new woodland opposite the cabin. These are for various tits, robins and hopefully sparrows.

Another large metal container has been positioned next to the café cabin and is being equipped with a work bench and various shelving for storage to make more room in the café cabin. Again, many thanks to David and his band of volunteers.

Apart from the physical work parties which take place on:

- 2ND SATURDAY IN THE MONTH AND EVERY THURSDAY MORNING.



Volunteers are urgently needed to bake cakes and help to run the Tea bar on a Sunday, meet and greet the visitors, take photos of activities, offer their skills for guided walks, first aid and surveys of birds, moths/butterflies, fungi, bats, dragonflies, spiders, small mammals and also to just record what they see on the reserve.

So don't be shy - please VOLUNTEER!
(see back page for details).

Alistair Stedman and David Highton in the blue container; Gary Dodds bringing in the rushes. A huge thank you to everyone who helps with the conservation and development of Cromwell Bottom LNR.

WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ



1. Wordsworth wrote a poem about which spring flowers?
2. Which small mammal did Will Shakespeare want to tame?
3. The Beatles sang about Daisy Chains in which song?
4. Which Goodie went birdwatching?
5. Which football team have a bluebird on their badge?
6. Which government body created the Special Protection Areas under the Wild Birds Directive?

(answers on the back page, but no peeking!)



Heron - image Graham Haigh



Robin - image Allan Wolfenden

AFTER THE FLOODS...

ARTICLE: DAVID LANGLEY AND LYNDA ORCHARD

Photos left showing the floods - Anne and Phillip Shaw



It was on December the 27th 2015 that the bridge over the canal at Cromwell Bottom was destroyed. Many parts of the local area were devastated but the reserve itself, although deluged with water, escaped serious damage.

The wooden bridge near the lagoon was washed down and everywhere coated in mud. It has taken 21 months for the canal bridge to be completed as the construction workers had to start from scratch. It was discovered that there were no viable foundations so new ones had to be put in.



During those 21 months, work by volunteers inside the reserve has gone on as normal even though it has been much more difficult to get materials over the canal. Everything, from building materials to supplies for the café, has had to be carried from the car park.



Brighouse Central Scouts

In spite of this, the volunteers have completed the ponds and the pond dipping platform, planted 2,000 trees, brought machinery up the river to mow the meadows and kept the reserve going.

Now that the bridge has been completed, landscaping work has been done on the ground opposite the cabin ready for planting. Consultations with the council about the use of North Loop are on-going. We hope that it will become part of the reserve in the future. Work goes on tirelessly to maintain the reserve for the present and to keep planning for the future.

Our vice chairman David Langley extends his thanks to all the Thursday volunteers and the people who man the cabin on Sundays.

He would also like to appeal to members to volunteer at the reserve. It's good fun and very satisfying (please see the back page for details of how to contact us).

WINTER DISCOVERIES

ARTICLE AND IMAGES - ALLAN WOLFENDEN

Goldeneye



Teal (m)



Winter can be an exciting time. While we may be finding it unpleasant and uncomfortable and compensate by turning the heating up and adding extra layers of clothing, it is a sobering fact that many of the birds that come here as winter visitors do so because of our relatively mild climate. Of course no two winters are the same and weather patterns are changing. What is occurring elsewhere in places like Scandinavia, Russia, Iceland and on the continent will determine the numbers of the over-wintering birds that may be seen here.

For me last winter was a good time to be out and about on the reserve and elsewhere in Calderdale.

There are two winter thrushes that come here to spend the winter, Redwings and Fieldfares. Last winter provided excellent opportunities to see both. On one occasion, while doing a bird count on North Loop as part of our monthly survey work, I watched over sixty feeding on the ground and resting in the surrounding trees.

Every winter sees an influx of ducks like Teal, Goldeneye and Tufted Duck and the numbers of Goosanders that can be seen on the reserve and surrounding area increases.

The Teal can usually be found above the weir on the river bank on the opposite side of the river to the footpath. Usually we get about twelve of these beautiful small ducks.

Great Crested Grebes can usually be found on the Ski Lake or Fishing Lake. Last year they were sporadic visitors, possibly due to either it being a relatively mild winter or human disturbance.

One winter visitor that always causes excitement is the appearance of Whooper Swans. True indicators that winter is here. On a number of occasions last winter small numbers dropped in on to the Ski Lake, much to the delight of those of us who happened to be there at the time.

Starlings are beautiful birds. We are used to seeing them around most of the time. Last winter we were privileged to see our own local starling murmuration over Brighouse. Not strictly on the reserve but near enough to go and enjoy. It set our hearts racing as dusk approached and we watched the shifting shapes of two thousand starlings coming down to roost in the centre of Brighouse.

All of these birds provided wow moments. For me, the winter visitor that provided the greatest wow moment was the arrival of Waxwings. Last winter was a good year to see these beautiful visitors from distant lands in the Brighouse and Halifax area. Will they be here again in large numbers? Possibly. Possibly not. But, the truth is none of us know what winter treasures we will discover unless we step out into the cold and see what delights it has for us to discover and enjoy.

Allan.

SQUAWKING SPRAWKING!

EVERYTHING YOU EVER NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT ...

THE SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*)

ARTICLE AND IMAGES: BARRY NIELD & MIKE HENSHAW

Is it Sparrowhawk or Sparrow Hawk? This does seem to be a common query from people, it should be one word, also called Eurasian Sparrowhawk or Northern Sparrowhawk. “Accipiter” is Latin for Hawk and comes from the word Accipere “**TO GRASP**”. In the birding world they are known affectionately as **Sprawks** and come from a sub-family called Accipitrinae, which is a group known as **True Hawks**.

Due to a natural balance between predator and prey Sparrowhawk numbers were stable up to the 1800’s when they suffered persecution from Victorian trophy hunters, gamekeepers and landowners.

During WWII there was reduced persecution and their numbers recovered a little, but by the late 1950’s they had started a big decline due to Organochlorine pesticides like DDT. The chemical accumulation in the birds’ bodies caused numerous problems like the thinning of eggshells, and even the death of the adult birds. A huge crash in population numbers happened by the end of the 50’s with this species almost disappearing in many counties of Eastern England where use of these pesticides was heaviest.

After many years of outcry against these chemicals they were finally banned and slowly Sparrowhawks started to recover. By the early 1980’s they had re-colonized a lot of their lost territories in Eastern England, and by around 1990 they had recovered

to approx. 32,000 breeding pairs. During the 1990’s their numbers had one or two local declines in response to declining food availability. Today there are around 35,000 breeding pairs!

A lot of people make comments regarding these birds in their gardens and feeding stations. Some people don’t like them for eating their little birds. Do not worry, they have a natural balance with their prey and will starve if there are no small birds left! They also breed only when the insect and caterpillars are in abundance, so there are a good supply of inexperienced juvenile birds to catch to feed their own young.

So enjoy them whilst you have them in your garden; look at the fantastic colours of the males, they really are striking, watch them as they twist and turn at up to 30mph in woodlands avoiding branches, trying to sneak up on little birds. Females will take prey up to pigeon size, but won’t turn down a thrush or chaffinch, whilst the males generally stick to

the smaller birds such as sparrows, chaffinch, blue tits etc.

When these birds are juvenile they are predominantly brown backed with horizontal brown chevrons across their chest. The adult females are similar to the juveniles but a little more grey in their backs and wings. Females are almost 25% bigger than the male, but the males are more striking to look at, with slate grey or bluish backs and wings, with a little orange to their chests, and if you look closely their chevrons are also orangey. As males get older apparently their eyes turn from yellow to orange, so if you’re local Sparrowhawk has orange eyes – he’s been around a while!

Female Sparrowhawk -image
Mike Henshaw



Male Sparrowhawk -image
Barry Nield



Male Sparrowhawk -image
Barry Nield





Male Sparrowhawks -images Barry Nield

Mortality rates in Sparrowhawks is quite high. Around a third of the adults die each year, and about two thirds of their fledged young will also die in their first year. Average lifespan is 2.7 years and it is reckoned that very few live longer than 7 years. A few weeks ago I spent a couple of days where a male Sparrowhawk was a regular twice a day visitor and would sit there munching on prey. What an experience – to be able to watch one so close and for so long, getting some fantastic pictures!

They regularly swoop through Cromwell Bottom feeding areas fancying their chances! Their job is to eliminate the sick or injured birds, and will take a mouse or vole if they see them. So don't be too hard on them when they pick off a poorly, slow small bird in your garden, it's what they were designed for. If we go creating a very tempting mobile buffet – how can they resist?

For further info please see me at the Cabin on Sundays.

Barry



THE GEOLOGY OF CROMWELL BOTTOM

ARTICLE STEVE BLACKSMITH CHAIR, HALIFAX SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

People may wonder about why the Nature Reserve is as it is. A clue is that the wider birding world still refers to it as the "Elland Gravel Pits", often shortened to EGP. The fields that were here beside the river were destroyed in the 1960s and 70s to extract the deep beds of gravel that lay beneath them. The office block on the main road with the clock on the front was the headquarters of Elliott's Sands and Gravel, who did the extraction. The gravel was a legacy of the last Ice Age. The geologists have worked out that there were two glaciers entering Calderdale, one came from the Burnley area along the Cliviger Gorge to Todmorden; another came along the Walsden Valley from the Littleborough

direction.

These two glaciers joined into one at Todmorden, and this single tongue of ice crept down to Mytholmroyd.

The two glaciers that entered Calderdale both spilled through the Pennines from the extensive Lancashire ice-field.

The last ice age continued for thousands of years but eventually, during the process of melting, apparently huge lakes of meltwater formed. One of these, held back only by weakening ice, eventually broke through and drained down the Calder Valley in a tremendous flash flood that must have made our current-day rain-created floods seem puny!

A colossal volume of water must have carried huge amounts of loose rock

along with it, and ripped away large swathes of the valley sides.

You can see where the valley has been almost artificially cut through above Hebden Bridge on the left, where gently sloping fields give way to a sharp edge, on the slope where Oak woodland grow right down to the canal.

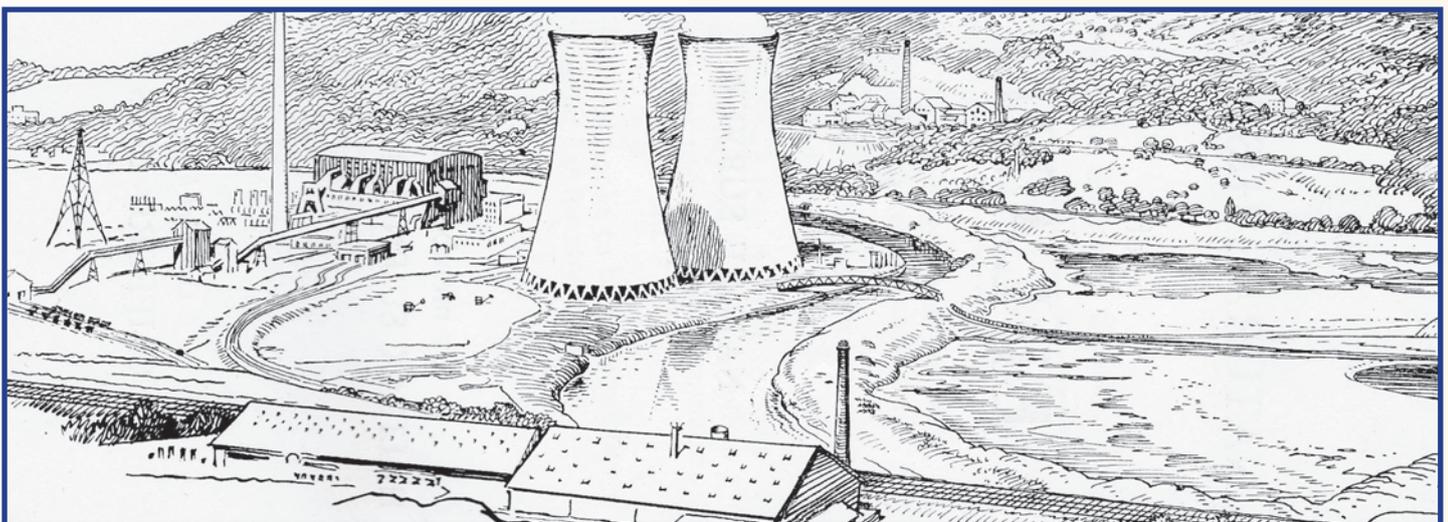
This is near Eastwood. All the tumbling rock would have smashed itself into small pieces and these soon got rounded off by the grinding action of the turbulent river. When the ground flattened out after Elland, and the speed slackened, it dumped all the stone, sand and gravel, so much of it that the now weakened flood had to snake from side to side to find a way through, creating the meanders that we see today and refer to

as the 'loops of the river'.



Photo above shows glacial till in the lower undisturbed level at Cromwell Bottom (just below weir on the right bank) washed down by floods from the Upper Calder Valley as the glaciers melted. (Right Bank means as you look downstream).

Steve.



This picture shows how the gravel pits were used to dispose of the fly-ash from the Elland Power Station. You can see the pipe installed across the river through which the liquified fly-ash was pumped. As the fly-ash dried out it was possible to walk on it, but it was unstable and it got the local name of The Wibbly-Wobbly!

Picture credited to artist Clifford Lees and taken from his Halifax Scientific Society booklet "The Natural History of Elland" (1963).

The Wildlife Group extend their thanks to Clifford Lees and HSS for the use of this material.

EVENTS JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2018

Photography Days: Saturday 20th January 10.00-2.30pm
Saturday 17th February 10.00-2.30pm

Come along and pick up a few tips on how to photograph birds and other wildlife, doesn't matter what kind of camera you have, even a mobile phone is ok! Everyone welcome. Meet at the Cabin.

Meet the Birds Days: Saturday 20th January 10.00-2.30pm
Saturday 17th February 10.00-2.30pm

(same as Photography Days). Meet at the Cabin and enjoy a walk around the Reserve identifying the Birds.

WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ - ANSWERS



1. Daffodils
2. Shrew
3. Dear Prudence
4. William Oddie
5. Cardiff City
6. The European Community

HOW YOU CAN HELP AT CROMWELL BOTTOM

Volunteers are the foundation upon which our wildlife group is built. Our work helps secure the future of many precious habitats and species, enabling them to thrive. We have many jobs to do, so no matter how much time you have there is ALWAYS something for you!

THURSDAY MORNINGS weekly at **9.30am** is a good time to come and help.
SECOND SATURDAY of each month at **9.30am** our work parties take place, arranged with Calderdale Council.



Please come along to either, or both of these days - its best to check our blogsite for up to the minute information.

We can promise good fun, a sense of achievement and a sit down with the group at the end for a well-earned cuppa!



How to contact us (CLICK ON ONE OF THE LINKS BELOW). We welcome your articles, photos, ideas, comments and would love to hear from you. We do, of course, retain editorial rights. **Your new newsletter team are Val, Jane & Lyn. We thank you for all your articles and photos for this edition.**



newsletter.cbwg@gmail.com



cromwellbottom.blogspot.co.uk



find us on Facebook [/Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group](https://www.facebook.com/CromwellBottomWildlifeGroup)



WORD SEARCH

THERE ARE 17 BIRDS HIDDEN in the grid below ...

The first person to bring the completed, correct entry to the Cabin on a Sunday wins a prize.
Yes - you heard it here first!!

S	B	U	V	G	N	D	R	A	L	L	A	M	W	N
W	P	C	O	M	M	O	N	G	U	L	L	V	U	C
R	A	A	Z	C	O	R	M	O	R	A	N	T	B	F
E	Q	O	R	S	T	E	R	D	X	I	H	Y	K	D
N	K	Y	J	R	O	B	I	N	P	A	R	M	O	S
Z	A	Q	M	P	O	L	C	P	T	W	O	N	R	L
J	A	C	K	D	A	W	N	C	O	A	L	T	I	T
M	B	R	G	R	E	Y	H	E	R	O	N	S	H	G
K	H	A	U	E	F	R	K	A	V	I	X	P	Z	U
C	Z	D	T	I	P	P	I	P	W	O	D	A	E	M
O	L	C	Q	H	J	X	F	T	E	K	Y	T	K	A
N	H	S	U	R	H	T	E	L	T	S	I	M	C	G
N	E	L	S	M	N	G	O	F	U	H	G	I	J	P
U	W	C	A	R	R	I	O	N	C	R	O	W	T	I
D	D	R	E	D	N	A	S	O	O	G	J	I	B	E

Mallard

Goosander

Cormorant

Grey Heron

Sparrowhawk

Common Gull

Jackdaw

Magpie

Jay

Carrion Crow

Coal Tit

Wren

Nuthatch

Mistle Thrush

Robin

Dunnock

Meadow Pipit

Based on the different species of birds seen through the year at Cromwell Bottom - full list on the notice board in the Cabin.

Compiler: Lynda Orchard