

Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2019/20



Blue tit on a
frosted log at the
bird viewing area

image credit Chris Latham

NEWS ROUND-UP *Hayley Cottrell, Trustee*



The photo above shows gala secretary Emma Weakes, myself and Christine, outgoing gala treasurer, presenting the cheque to me at the Gala AGM 30th Sep 2019.

Back in the summer, at the end of June, Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group had a stall at the Brighthouse Charity Gala, staffed by myself, David Langley and Simon Day, with the support of other trustees and members dropping in during what proved to be one of the hottest days on record!

The stall made £77.55 with the uplift given from the Gala.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!
Next years Gala day is Saturday 27th
June 2020



credit Allan
Wolfenden

Barn Owl Breeding Success at Cromwell Bottom

Barn Owls are a much loved bird. Many of us have been delighted to watch Barn owls fly and hunt on nature reserves we have visited. As a group, especially with the capping of North Loop and the subsequent meadows and margins that were created, it has been a bird that we had planned to attract.

I am glad to be able to share

with our readers and other concerned bodies that in late summer a pair took up residence and subsequently raised three Juveniles. These three juveniles, all females, have been ringed and have now successfully fledged. It has been a delight to monitor them and watch their progress.

We will be dedicating a special CBWG newsletter in the near future to Barn Owls where we hope to include different contributions and pictures from different people who have been part of this conservation success story.

Allan Wolfenden

Winter Works Programme

During the summer we applied for a few grants and I'm glad to say that we were successful (the down side being that it's a lot of work!). We were hoping to spread the work load over a few months but our preferred contractor only had a window in November. We are taking the opportunity to try and complete all the major work before Christmas and of course the breeding season, with the help of Cromwell Volunteers, Calderdale MBC & their Volunteers.

- The path to the bird viewing area is almost complete. We had to install more drainage pipes to cope with the recent deluges!
- Further along the paths to Cromwell Lock we are installing a viewing platform with a grant from Tesco Plastic Bag Fund & Brighouse Ladies Circle.
- We have made a passing place to the side & all of these should be complete by the time you get this newsletter. This will make a great place to sit a while and let the world go by.

- The path across the bund between the reed bed and wet woodland is being upgraded and although not an official path, people are still using it and a couple of people have fallen over the exposed tree roots. We are now making that safer with a grant from the Rastrick Big Local and this will be completed soon (weather permitting).

- After a survey by Access for All for less abled (or should I say more abled) people, we found we needed to fix a few things around the reserve. One is a disabled toilet and we are working towards doing that. We are also upgrading the paths around the reserve though this won't be completed for a while. We are working to make Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve the best in Calderdale, if not Yorkshire for disabled and wheelchair users. Please bear with us - we are trying to improve the reserve for everyone.

Yours, Graham (Chair CBWG)

LOOK BACK AT AUTUMN

AUTUMN FUNGI: PARACHUTES AND CLUBS

Charlie Streets

November the woodland floors are littered with a tremendous diversity of fungi, here I've picked three recent finds worthy of further investigation.



The first is one of the Parachute species, so called because the caps resemble miniature parachutes. It was quite common at Tag Cut during my visit though I doubt anyone passing by would so much as glance in their direction as their caps measured no more than 3mm across. Despite their size and fragility they function just like

any other mushrooms, their gills produce spores and when they are ripe enough they drop silently in their thousands. Some fall to earth and others are whisked away on the merest of breezes to continue life in pastures new. I suspect the Parachute is **Marasmius setosus** but to be certain the spores would have to be examined under a microscope at around 500x magnification to clinch the identification. A typical spore may measure 10 microns or 1/100th of a millimeter but their size and shape vary considerably depending on the species.



The second fungi is Wrinkled Club (**Clavulina rugosa**), they were found in good numbers in the woodland opposite the cabin, dotted about on the ground like dozens of modern art exhibits, vying for height amongst the ever deepening leaf litter.

These are spore-shooters (**ascomycetes**) as opposed to the mushrooms which are spore-droppers. The spores are produced on the outer surface of the clubs in countless, microscopic flasks called asci which typically contain eight spores. Then, when suitable conditions arise, usually influenced by the temperature, the flasks explode firing the spores skywards.



The last species is perhaps the most unusual of the three, it's the jelly fungus Yellow Brain (***Tremella mesenterica***). Tag Cut is a reliable place to see this one, often on dead Willow branches. It's quite easy to spot when recent rains have kept it hydrated as that's when the vibrant colour is at it's most intense. It is unusual in that it's parasitic and will only feed on the roots (mycelium) of ***Peniophora crust*** fungi.

Often the host has yet to fruit so all you will see is a bright yellow fungus apparently growing on dead wood.

Fungi are among the most beautiful, photogenic, mysterious and important of all the reserve's wildlife and will no doubt add that extra level of interest to any walk around the reserve during the autumn. They are certainly worthy of consideration in any future management plans

EDUCATION LINKS WITH OLD EARTH PRIMARY SCHOOL ELLAND

Simon Day, Trustee & Education Lead

We are in our second year of close links with the school whereby each year group aims to visit twice each school year to take part in various outdoor and wildlife-based activities.

So far, such visits have included:

- birdwatching
- pond dipping
- multi-sensory walks
- guided walks around the reserve
- bug hotel building
- birdbox making
- map reading.

The children have without exception behaved in an exemplary way, shown great enthusiasm for their learning and hopefully had their education enriched further by their visits. Such visits take time and planning and **I would like to express my sincere thanks to the**

volunteers from Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group who readily lead and guide groups of children in learning activities.



No vacancies!

Also, many thanks to the staff at Old Earth, especially Mrs Fox for her enthusiasm as the link person at the school. We are delighted that the school has a dedicated display in the entrance which showcases all the fantastic and rewarding links we share.



WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ

created by Will Griffin

- 1 . Where did people believe swallows hibernated in Winter?
2. What is the herb wintergreen used for?
3. Which water bird nest builds in winter near Cromwell Bottom?
4. How many wind turbines can be seen from Cromwell Bottom?
- 5 . Which mammals have a coat that turns white in Winter?
6. What kind of tree do partridges infest in the Christmas song?
7. If you sniffed otter poo what would it smell of?
 - a) Old Holborn
 - b) Jasmine tea
 - c) Old ale
 - d) Old spice
8. Which group shares the valley with the Wildlife Group?
 - a) The nudists
 - b) The magic circle
 - c) The rocket scientists
 - d) The Mormons
9. At what height would you pollard a tree?
10. Which cartoon character complained that his volunteer had escaped?

WALKING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND

Allan Wolfenden



Lagoon in winter
credit Allan Wolfenden

Snow had fallen throughout the night and it was still snowing as I walked to the nature reserve at Cromwell Bottom. Wrapped up against the cold I walked down the canal towpath, my steps muffled by the deep blanket of snow underneath my boots. In the winter morning light everything looked different.

The nature reserve looked beautiful in its pristine appearance. The branches of trees and bushes, arched over by the weight of snow, seemed to extend a wintry welcome. Blackbirds scurried about in the hawthorn bushes, seeking priceless berries that would still their hunger and fuel their energy. The snow, beautiful to me had made life difficult for them.

As I arrived at the Bird Viewing Area I was greeted by the sight of lots of small birds. Each bird, having survived the night, was now intent on consuming as much food as possible in preparation for the cold evening they instinctively knew was coming. As I refilled the feeders and put out more fat balls I thought of how hard winter can be for these birds and hoped that what I was doing would make a difference.

It had stopped snowing as I left the Bird Viewing Area. Following the river path I quickly realised that others were out early that morning also. Footprints of people and dogs could be seen pressed into the snow giving away their direction of travel on this wintry morning. Suddenly there is the rapid beating of wings on the river.

I notice two Goosanders flying low down-river, seeking to put distance between us. The only birds that remain are Mallard, who seem impervious to my presence as I choose to linger in the cold air to check out if there might just be an elusive Kingfisher perched on a low overhanging branch. Disappointed I move on, making my way across the bund that separates the Lagoon from the Wet Woodland.

As I walk between the Willows that are on either side of the bund I am struck by how beautiful the reed-bed is covered in its icy garment. No birds to be seen here today but I am not disappointed. I am looking out on a pristine wintry scene that evokes a beauty that brings a stab of joy and contentment within me. That is what nature does, it gives you a sense of connection and wholeness.

As I make my way home, with the snow beginning to melt, I am thankful for my walk to and around the reserve. I relish the hot drink that awaits me and the memories of a winter's day walk that I will hold.



Steps up to the Bund in winter - credit Allan Wolfenden

THE WOODS IN WINTER

Julie Jackson

Now most of the deciduous trees have lost their leaves how about seeing how many you can still identify. It is worth looking closely at the bark and for any buds or catkins on the branches. Perhaps the easiest is the Silver birch with its white bark with darker cracks. Look alongside the path to the weir where hawthorn and blackthorn grow together. Hawthorns produce a mass of thorny twigs but the thorns are nowhere near as long as those on the blackthorn.

Hazel trees have a very smooth, shiny bark and are usually multi-stemmed.

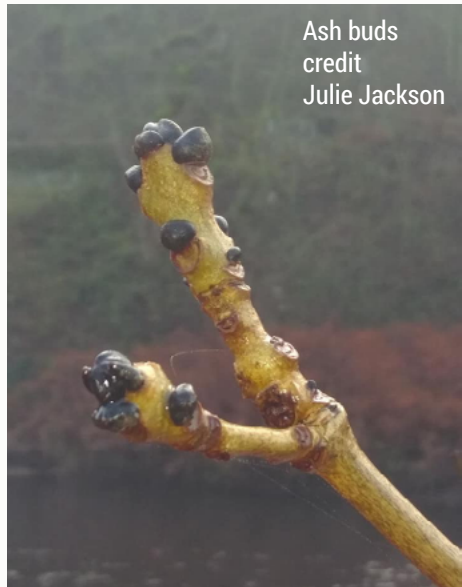
Over the winter months they will be producing catkins which are easy to spot along the river path by the lagoon. Also found in damper places is the Alder. Look for a tree with a more asymmetrical shape.

Ash can be recognised by the black buds along its branches. Rowan will be starting to produce small felty buds.

As we approach spring the buds of the Horse Chestnut will become sticky before they open.

The other telltale sign for horse chestnut are the horseshoe shaped scars left on branches from the old leaves.

In terms of flowering plants there may not be much to see but if you look carefully you may find ivy in flower – small, yellowy green clusters called umbels. Once we get into the new year you may spot the pale yellow of primrose and the bright yellow of coltsfoot – sure signs that spring is on the way.



Ash buds
credit
Julie Jackson

THE WINTER WILDLIFE GARDEN

Dan Buckle

There's no doubting winter can be a struggle. Luckily for the vast majority of us, a hot drink and quick whinge about the weather will suffice in passing the time. Out in the British wilds however, it's life or death. The wildlife-friendly garden can be a lifeline at this time of year - here's what you can do to aid some of our native fauna.

Last Supper

The simplest thing you can do this winter is to provide food at the bird-table. Especially during the later months of January and February when nature has all but relinquished her bounty to ravenous flocks of feathered hunter-gatherers. Nuts and seeds, fat-balls and suet supplement the wild diet perfectly. A high fat content is essential for providing the energy to stay warm and function during the coldest months. Calorically-dense homemade fat cakes packed with peanuts and kitchen scraps are a great way to attract birds to the winter garden.

Along with food, don't forget to provide water. A small bowl of water on the bird-table will suffice, but if you have the space, building a small pond is a fantastic idea. Not only will it provide an essential winter water supply, a

wildlife pond is a great attraction all year round.

When it comes to feeding however, a bird-table banquet should be regarded as nothing more than supplementation.



As a long term strategy in the winter garden, nothing quite beats nature's own provision. If you have the space, plant trees and shrubs known for their autumn berries. Winter is the perfect time to plant bare-root specimens.

You can't go far wrong with native species, or some of their ornamental cultivars - holly, hawthorn, blackthorn and rowan are some of the best for starlings, blackbirds and other thrushes. You can try the Spindle tree, *Euonymus europaeus* - a large shrub with yellow flowers in spring, followed in the autumn by red fruits which split to reveal seeds as the season progresses (see image overleaf).

Spindle tree - *Eonymus europaeus*



Or perhaps dogwood, *Cornus sanguinea*, with its dark berries and bright red stems. Try Dog Rose for autumn hips, and Guelder rose for its vibrant red winter berries. Climbers such as Ivy and Honeysuckle are good options where horizontal space is limited. Ivy especially will provide food up until late winter.

On warmer winter days you may be surprised to see pollinating insects on the wing. Indeed, in some areas of the country bees and hoverflies can be seen



Hoverfly credit Allan Wolfenden

throughout the winter months (with some bumblebee queens deciding to forego the usual hibernation period altogether) especially in our slightly warmer towns and cities. Like a lot of

things, nectar can be in short supply during the colder months, so winter flowering plants are often a lifeline for these invertebrates. Early flowering bulbs provide nectar from late winter into spring - try winter aconite, crocus, snowdrops, scilla siberica, and early flowering daffodils such as narcissus pseudonarcissus. Flowers such as winter-flowering heathers, honeysuckle and clematis, christmas rose, cyclamen and primrose will collectively put on a show all winter.

The Big Sleep

Of course, while some creatures are happy to stay awake throughout the season, many have evolved to put their bodies on standby and spend these months in hibernation. Providing resources for these organisms is invaluable and can be achieved in a garden of any size. Bug hotels are a great idea for invertebrates - available to buy in many sizes, and relatively easy to build yourself. They provide essential shelter for creatures such as bumblebees, ladybirds and woodlice, and they look good too, often making an attractive feature in the garden. Larger structures are able to accommodate organisms such as frogs, mice, and hedgehogs.

Primary

You can see a picture of the Bug Hotel the children of Old Earth Primary School have built on a previous page. Yes, I know, its full!

Borders filled with herbaceous perennials are a striking sight during the summer, but by winter they have transformed themselves into a tangled mass of brown soggy leaves and stems. To ensure there are plenty of hideaways for wildlife in the winter garden, wait until the spring before you tidy up. The downside of this is that the borders can look unsightly, though the dried, hollowed stems of teasels and sedums provide attractive architectural interest throughout the winter months. Or if you prefer a tidy garden, perhaps designate small areas of the garden as natural hibernacula with piles of logs and leaves.

If you have nestboxes in the garden, now is the time to clean them out. Remove old nests and sterilise with boiling water. When dry, put the box back up - birds will use them as roost sites over winter.

As you can see, it's possible to turn a garden of any size into a winter refuge, so why not try out some of the above suggestions in your own space this season.



Robin in snow credit Allan Wolfenden





WILL'S WILDLIFE QUIZ - ANSWERS

1. The bottom of a pond
2. Tea, medicine and flavouring
3. Grey Heron
4. Four last time I counted
5. Stoat or mountain hare
6. Pear
7. b - Jasmine tea
8. a - Nudists
9. Beyond the reach of a grazing animal
10. Hagar the horrible

HOW DID YOU DO?



CROMWELL BOTTOM LIVE POETS SOCIETY

WINTER WINDOW SHOW

My window pane performs its winter show
as silver specks of ice begin to seed.

Hundreds of tiny pins now grow and grow
and one lengthens to form a dagger blade.

Then from the hilt a silver sword soon grows
and on each edge there form sets of spikes,
ready to stab and snag like savage claws.

Next come some spears along with piercing pikes.

One blade broadens and swings into a turn,
forming the crescent curve of a cutlass.

On this some hoar frost forms a fine white fern.

My window pane now all is frosted glass.

©TONY HARGREAVES

Which way do you view the negative space
little image above? A path and tree or two faces?