cbwg Newsletter

Autumn/ Winter 2023/2024



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Front cover image: Black Darter credit Mike Henshaw. A 'first sighting' from Mike and Graham Haigh Sept 2023.





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briefing to members



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cromwellbottomlnr.co.uk



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Welcome



Simon Day Chair of CBWG



David Langley
Jt. Vice Chair

It's been very much business as usual at Cromwell Bottom since our last publication back in April. Volunteers continue to work tirelessly on the reserve, maintaining the precious habitats. More and more people are discovering the reserve for the first time and increasingly, visiting from neighbouring local authorities such as Kirklees, Bradford and Leeds.

School and community visits have significantly increased with over 20 class visits and almost 50 organised visits between August 2022 and August 2023. Membership has increased to over 150, partly due to first time members taking the opportunity to join as a result of attending our hugely successful Open Day (in terms of visitor numbers) in August.

Simon Day. Chair. CBWG



Hayley Cottrell Jt. Vice Chair



Little Bob, Peregrine Falcon, joined us for Open Day, along with several other Birds of Prey (courtesy of Shibden Valley Falconry).

Editor's note:

If you haven't seen Simon's video of a walk around the reserve, you might wish to hover your phone camera over the adjacent QR code, or click if online.



AROUND THE RESERVE

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Jean, Roger, Anne, Tony ~ four of our dedicated honorary members enjoying refreshments and a catch-up in the Visitor Centre after one of their regular walks around the reserve.

A raffle winner at Open Day



Robin Owen-Morley spotted this

post on Facebook recently: from Adelaide Gowing, mum to Alianna, after the Open Day: "Thank you so much for a wonderful day. Alianna loved everything from the pond dipping, holding the corn snake, learning about hedgehogs, winning the fox cuddly toy, learning about peat bogs, meeting the owl and Bob the badger; but to end the day one very happy girl winning the hamper x".

A budding young naturalist



I really like going to Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve for a walk with my mum. I enjoy it because I love nature and seeing all the different wildlife there. We sometimes visit with my school and we got to dissect some Barn Owl pellets, I found this really interesting because I like birds of prey too.

We found a shrew skull, rat tail and some teeth! *Coby, aged 11*

Rabbit, rabbit ... Alistair Sedman



This rabbit appeared in late August and several times after that, outside the Visitor Centre. It was in good condition. As its ears were longer than a wild rabbit we deduced that it must be an escaped pet. We all thought it had come to a grim end with Mr Fox but it was spotted munching grass near the Gruffalo Education tent in the woods. There was another rabbit seen recently....!



Wetland Wonders Mike Henshaw

This is part of a project begun in 2022, and the first year results were superb as we are now able to keep water in this location for a full twelve months each year.

One fine afternoon in September I had gone to North Loop when I looked up from my seat and lo and behold I saw a darter, one which looked different from the usual darter dragonflies up there. After waiting for quite some time I got close enough to get a photograph. It was a **Black Darter**, and as far as we know has never been recorded on this site.

Two days later I returned with Graham Haigh, and after what seemed like a huge time lapse, it was suddenly spotted - and this time it was mating with a female! Graham managed to get some very good pictures of the pair. Pictured above (and front cover) is the first one I saw.

Several days elapsed when I visited the location again. I noticed the male busily flying around but as it was such a very hot day, I had to go. With the list of species growing, it came up with this Black Darter, a first for Cromwell Bottom. Plans are now afoot to try to extend this wetland in the near future.

This does show the importance of keeping these wetlands alive, the results can be phenomenal.

Herons Above! Simon Day



Since the early 2000's there have been nesting herons at the edge of the pallet premises near to our Visitor Centre. In 2007, two nests were recorded, growing steadily to ten in 2023. Over the years, the site has become increasingly popular with photographers, especially during the nesting season, as the adult herons can be seen collecting twigs with which to re-build their nests. On 17th August, an employee of the pallet works brought down an injured heron probably female, clearly unable to fly and in a state of distress. A local wildlife rehabilitator was contacted and the heron was safely transported to his place of care, where it was looked after until it recuperated. The heron has now made a full recovery and has been released back into the wild. So, if you come across a heron answering to the

name of Gandolf, you know from whence it came!

BRIGHOUSE LADIES CIRCLE

Hayley Cottrell



Late July and August saw the return of the Brighouse Ladies Circle 'Kids and Critters' days.

The Ladies Circle is a fundraising group. Each year a new chairlady is appointed and she will nominate the charity which will be the focus of the fundraising that year.

In 2018 they raised £3000 towards the viewing platform at the lagoon. This year's charity is Focus4Hope.

On the two 'Kids and Critters' days around 30 children enjoyed a canal path walk with a nature hunt from Brighouse to the visitors' centre at Cromwell Bottom. These walks and the activities were guided by members of the Ladies Circle.

Whilst at Cromwell, the adults and children headed over to the education area where they settled down for a 'bring your lunch' stop. Afterwards there was bug hunting, pond dipping and den building (some with seats and a TV). This involved a lot of running around to find sticks and importantly working together. The sessions were rounded of with some simple craft activities as a calming way to finish. The children aged from 3 to 8 had a wonderful time as did the adults rediscovering the kids inside them.

A big shout out to the volunteers at Cromwell Bottom with an extra thank you to Julie Jackson for getting things off to a great start. It is brilliant to see two community groups coming together to provide summer fun and encouraging engagement with wildlife for families from the local area.



Facebook -Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group



Facebook Brighouse Ladies Circle



Facebook Focus4Hope

A CHARITY CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
Here for everyone
affected by cancer

~ Julie Jackson, Trustee

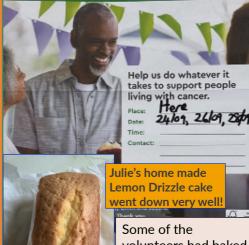


Let's do something amazing

Wildlife Group Let's do a Macmillan
Coffee Morning

As a charity we are delighted to be supported by so many lovely people who enable us to continue work on the reserve. We also like to support other charities and once a year we donate our visitor centre takings to another charity. This usually happens around Christmas time.

This year I had seen lots of adverts for the MacMillan coffee morning and suggested to the trustees that this might be our charity of choice for this year. Their work in supporting people with cancer is very dear to our hearts as I am sure it is for many people. The trustees agreed that we should donate takings from September 24th, 26th and 28th to this good cause. This will be instead of our usual dates in December.



volunteers had baked cakes for the event and Graham had very kindly been to Costco for carrot cake and chocolate cake.

We were thrilled by the generosity of our visitors towards this wonderful cause.

Enjoying a snack in VC on the first of the Macmillan days - doggy loving it too!



FROM THE BEAST ...

Dragonflies and their Exoskeleton ~ Allan Wolfenden, Trustee





A Delightful Discovery

I had gone up to the new pond on North Loop to continue some of the survey work on the new pond. I and Mike Henshaw had been recording and where possible photographing the number of species of Damselflies and Dragonflies that new pond was attracting. All through June it had been a hotspot of activity.

That afternoon was warm but relatively quiet. There was just one male Four Spotted Chaser patrolling the length of the pond. He was waiting for a female and was ready to defend what he now considered as his patch of territory. As I explored the pond vegetation, looking for signs of other dragonfly activity I saw what looked like a dragonfly clinging to the emerging leaf of a plant in the pond. As I looked closer it became clear that I was looking at something very special, something I had not seen before.

A Marvel of Nature

What I was looking at was the exoskeleton of a dragonfly. Probably, because of the

pristine condition it was in, it may well have been the exoskeleton of the Four-Spotted Chaser I had just been watching.



Dragonflies undergo what is called an incomplete metamorphosis. Unlike butterflies and moths they don't go into a pupae stage as a way of transitioning from larva or nymph to an adult dragonfly. Underwater, living in the vegetation and mud this four spotted chaser dragonfly larva would have started life as an egg laid twelve months before. (That's how old this pond

is). After hatching, possibly between two and four weeks of being laid, it would have looked like a tadpole (Prolarva) before undergoing a number of marvellous transitions.

Terrific Transitions

Dragonfly larvae is quite remarkable. They vary in shape and size, depending on the species. But, all are ferocious predators, a trait they continue as adult dragonflies. They all have a head, thorax, wingsheafs and abdomen. All are well camouflaged, have six legs, eyes that point forward from their head, which has an extendable hinged jaw that can shoot out and catch its prey. Their prey will consist of other insect larvae, tadpoles, snails worms and even small fish that are living within the pond.

TO THE BEAUTY!

As dragonfly larvae, they make a number of transitions on the way to becoming an adult, becoming larger each time. Depending on the location, it can consist of between five and fourteen changes.

Then, on a warm day, early in the morning the final change occurs. The beast takes on the nature of beauty. Having spent some time in shallower water breathing air, it will climb out. Having attached itself securely to a leaf or plant stem, it will then use its body fluids to expand its thorax, head and wings.

Emerging from the protective shell that has been its body in its final stage of transition. It now leaves behind its cast and takes to the wing. Its life now is as an amazing aerial predator, a flying killer of great beauty and grace.

As I looked at the exoskeleton, still attached to the leaf, I marvelled at the process of its presence. Truly a marvel of nature that we should delight in. What is truly fascinating is that this process is taking place within the ponds that we visit on the reserve. So often, we are not aware of it

Four-Spotted Chasers

Four-Spotted Chasers are a medium sized, dull looking brown dragonfly. They have four distinctive spots on their wings. They have a tapered abdomen with some black coloration on the final third. Each wing has a yellowish tint to it and like all Chasers they have black patches to the base of their hindwings. The males are territorial and can be seen flying around emerging vegetation, often returning to a particular perch. Females look very similar to males. Mating takes

place on the wing. A Female that has mated will hover over the water, flicking her abdomen into the water she will release her eggs, which will hatch within two to four weeks to begin the larvae process.

Four-Spotted-Chasers are a common Dragonfly and quite widespread. They like well vegetated ponds with standing water, which makes the ponds we have on the reserve at Cromwell Bottom such an ideal place for them. Like their close relative, the Broad-Bodied, Chaser, they are active from late spring and summer. They are stunning and wonderful insects



that have amazing sight due to their compound eyes, can hover and fly in any direction and kill for a living. They have razor sharp mandibles and spines on their legs for impaling their food. They are indeed, like all dragonflies, formidable beasts that reflect such beauty. **We should enjoy them.**



Life-changing moments start here!

The literary giant Arnold Schwarzenegger wrote in his recent autobiography that 'if you want to be anything in life - be useful'.

Surely good advice and one great way to be very useful, is to volunteer in the jewel of Calderdale we call Cromwell Bottom. This article explores what volunteering means in the reserve and, most importantly, celebrates our wonderful crew who make CWB a great place to visit.

Why is Volunteering Important?

Without volunteers, there would, of course, be no service with a smile in the Visitor Centre and facilities, e.g. toilets would not be sustainable. Nor could we welcome school groups and encourage wider access to the reserve if pathways were not maintained and also kept safe from encroaching vegetation. Without volunteers nature would also be impacted, as there would be less maintenance and improvements of diverse habitats such as the Sphagnum Bog, North Loop and the Lagoon; and of course invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam would quickly encroach.





This year alone, our volunteers have supported crucial work across the reserve, working in conjunction with Calderdale Council, which is a huge supporter of the work that we do. Activities have included:

- Tree planting on North Loop
- Recording all bird box activity
- Building new nest boxes
- Removing saplings from Sphagnum bog
- Coppicing in the Lagoon
- Keeping invasive Himalayan Balsam at bay
- Supporting 26 school class visits and 43 other visits across a wide range of interest groups in the past year
- Organising the annual Open Day
- Providing nature and educational talks at local organisations
- Clearing ponds and ditches.

What does Volunteering Involve?

Not all our volunteering is visible, and perhaps often it is the less glamorous work which is the most important. Our accounts need to be managed, newsletters written and produced, grants applied for, website and social media maintained, planning for school visits, organising VC rotas, maintaining essential equipment are but a few of the many activities willing folks undertake behind the scenes.



Litter picking (sadly, a very big job)



Serving refreshments in the VC



Updating the butterfly survey list



Checking tools prior to use

A massive thank you to all our volunteers for every contribution, big or small. You are appreciated.

Anyone interested in helping us can apply to volunteer in one of three ways: pop in to the VC and speak to us, email directly the Chair of the Wildlife Group on cbwgwildlife@gmail.com or visit our website where there are several buttons to click on to 'Contact Us'.



Volunteeers prior to working on the Lagoon



... and after all that, it's lunch time!

MOTH BREAKFASTS

Anthony Arak, Lead Moth Expert for CBWG

2023 will be remembered as the year when Calderdale moth-ers "came out"! Normally pre-occupied trying to identify extremely boring small brown moths, this group of three – Charlie Streets, Andy Cockroft and myself decided to go public and share their excitement for moths with the visitors to Cromwell Bottom. Thus, the "Moth Breakfast" was born!

Some hard work was involved, trudging across the lagoon at dusk, swamped by midges and mosquitoes; then plodding across North Loop grasslands on a Saturday night with a heavy generator to power a light trap for moths. Wouldn't it have been better staying in and watching weekend TV? On Sunday morning we knew our efforts had paid off, as visitors flooded in with their children to inspect the night's catch.

For the Sunday morning visitors, the "wow factor" was being witness to the largest and brightest of moths that had not before existed in the imagination. A regular highlight was the Poplar hawkmoth: with scalloped wings, big, bold and full of character. An encounter with a hawk-moth is always special, and the Poplar hawk is the one most likely to make your acquaintance.

The bright pink Elephant hawk-moth is absolutely stunning. I don't know if it is a coincidence that the adult moth's pink wings are the same

colour of the flower of its larval foodplant: rosebay willowherb. If you have not experienced one of these beautiful moths shuddering its wings on the palm of your hand prior to a vertical take-off, then you haven't really lived! It is the moth equivalent of a Harrier jump jet.

During the season there were many fabulous moths worth seeing, among others the beautiful green Large Emerald, Gold-spot, Peppered moth, Swallow Prominent, Burnished Brass, and the exquisitely camouflaged Bufftip moth that resembles a broken twig.

Cromwell Bottom is a great location for moths: approximately half of Calderdale's 960 moth species have been recorded on the reserve, including a few nationally rare species. The great diversity of moths at Cromwell likely reflects the juxtaposition of several different habitat types. Grassland, woodland and reed-beds all produce different moth assemblages. During the season we placed moth traps in each of these different habitats. The trap on the North Loop grasslands consistently produced the greatest number and variety of moths. This is a great achievement considering just a few years ago this part of the reserve was a landfill site. It is a testament to what can be done, with mindful management, to enhance local biodiversity within a short timescale. Give nature an inch, and it will take a mile!

Most of us focus on the things that are immediately obvious and in front of our eyes. But this means we often miss out on some of the smaller and fascinating species with weird and wonderful lifestyles. In the moth world, small is often beautiful, though you may need a good eye or magnifying glass to appreciate it.

The Water Veneer (see image below), a small and unassuming species, is common at Cromwell Bottom in the reed beds, and has a remarkable life history, living in and around ponds and slow-moving waters. The larvae are entirely aquatic and feed on pondweeds.

The males, only a few millimetres across have pale white wings, and swarm on nights when wingless females are coming to the surface to mate. After mating the wingless females swim underwater to lay their eggs, and so the life cycle continues. Then there is a moth that doesn't look like a moth. A day-flying species, completely harmless, but almost a perfect mimic of a hornet. A male Lunar Hornet Moth, a "first" recorded at Cromwell Bottom in the summer of 2023, attracted to a pheromone lure! For visitors sitting around tables quietly eating their moth breakfasts, it was bound to cause panic!















WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

~ Simon Day

Primary school visits have increased to an average of once a week, particularly during the spring and summer months. It has been a pleasure to accommodate several visits from Old Earth, Longroyde, and Sowerby New Road Primary Schools, where children have enjoyed a range of activities. These include pond dipping, den building, wildlife ID walks, minibeast hunting, history and geography themed walks. No charge is made for any such visits, but donations are always appreciated. My thanks go to those volunteers who have assisted me in delivering these very worthwhile and rewarding sessions.



School den building session

Gruffalo event



COMMUNITY LINKS



~ Simon Day

Community links go from strength to strength, particularly in terms of scheduled visits from a wide range of organisations. These include walking groups and regular activity visits from Cygnet Lodge, Brighouse. We are extremely grateful for the more recent moth events which have been held monthly since May. These have created much community interest, largely due to the fantastic range of species trapped and the sheer number of specimens. Our thanks go to Anthony Arak, Andrew Cockroft and Charlie Streets for willingly providing their time and expertise. Please see the Moth article and stunning photos on page 12 and 13 of this publication.







Anthony

Andrew

Charlie





Species recorded during bat night this year at Cromwell Bottom with the ones in red common to the area: Common Pipistrelle, Daubentons, Noctule, Soprano, Nathusius Pipistrelle, Lesser Noctule, Western Barbastelle and Brown Long Eared.

Here is some info from www.bats.org.uk - "Bats hunt for insects at night, using a high frequency system called echolocation. Bat calls are usually pitched at too high a frequency for humans to hear naturally - but they can be heard or recorded using different types of bat detectors".

>We have purchased bat detectors and have held several well attended bat nights since the summer.

Visit of Alex Sobel

We were pleased to be visited by MP Alex Sobel, Shadow Minister for Nature and MP for NW Leeds. Included in the visitors was Calderdale Councillor Jenny Lynn. Alex showed great interest in the work of CBWG, particularly in relation to the maintenance of the precious sphagnum bog and our efforts to improve the lagoon habitat.



SPHAGNUM PROJECT

Gill Wrigley

Sphagnum moss is the building block of peat. Peat holds the carbon from the bodies of plants that were alive thousands of years ago. Historical pollution and land use has meant that most of the sphagnum in Calderdale has died and the peat has dried out, releasing this carbon. In order to keep the rest of the carbon locked in our peat we need to reintroduce sphagnum to rewet the peat. This has the added bonus of slowing the flow of water into our rivers, reducing moorland fire risk and increasing the diversity of life that can survive on our moorland. This is the reasoning behind the Calderdale sphagnum project which is a four year project funded by the National Lottery to discover ways of growing sphagnum moss.

Planting plans

Now that we have a healthy crop of sphagnum moss, the Calderdale Sphagnum Project are looking towards suitable sites for planting. We have a 'carbon net zero accelerator' grant from West Yorkshire Combined Authority to rewet 25 hectares of moorland. One site we are looking to rewet is 5 hectares of land at the top of Ogden Water Country Park. Lately we have been surveying the site, firstly with a consultant from Moors For The Future Partnership, who measured peat depth and advised about dam building (to hold water), heather and grass cutting and tree translocation (from deep to shallow peat) then we recorded existing vegetation.

Hiccups

This summer has been a challenge for the project. There was a five month hitch with the irrigation system at our other site in Halifax, so the Cromwell Bottom polytunnel was filled beyond capacity with extra moss. The dry month of June meant that water for those hundreds of trays of moss was in scarce supply. Every week during the drought, volunteers from Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group topped up one of the water butts with tap water and isolated it for a few days for the chlorine to dissipate.



Surveying and recording the current vegetation near Ogden Water.

Spreading the moss growing bug

The last week of August saw a visit from personnel from National Trust Brecon Beacons, National Trust Marsden Moor and the Lancashire Peat Partnership. All three groups are enthused about setting up their own sphagnum moss nurseries. They will be using our techniques and will be supported by us to do this. What a legacy for the project to have many nurseries across UK growing sphagnum and rewetting peat landscapes!

What can I do?

To minimise your impact of carbon release from peat, when you are out on the moors please keep to waymarked trails to avoid extra erosion from desire lines, pick up after your dog to avoid changing the soil biology and do not start a fire or barbeque.

If you are buying plants choose plants that are grown in peat free compost and if you are buying compost pick peat free.

To volunteer with the Calderdale sphagnum project. Contact countryside@ calderdale.gov.uk. If you already volunteer with the Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group, ask to join the Sphagnum Watering Squad WhatsApp so you can help with maintenance of the project when I am away.

Editor's note: Thank you to Gillian for keeping us informed about this important project, and well done to the Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group volunteers for their essential contribution to it.



The effects on Sphagnum propagation of two different growing media located in the two halves of the tray.

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER Kirsty Collins









