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# A warm welcome from everyone at Cromwell Bottom, to the Spring/Summer edition of our newsletter.



Spring is a time for new beginnings in our natural world, but, as I complete a second busy and fulfilling year as chair, I want to briefly look back and highlight the contributions of founder members of our organisation, without whose passion and vision we would not be enjoying the successes we have today.

CBWG had its beginnings in 2010, thanks to five people, namely, Graham Haigh, Mike Henshaw, Allan Wolfenden, Bruce Hoyle and David Langley. As a team, these

five were the driving force in establishing the group, combining their skills, knowledge and vision, to develop Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve into a haven for wildlife for visitors to enjoy. Their combined vast knowledge of wildlife, leadership skills, technical abilities and sheer determination to succeed ensured the group started on firm foundations. They were indeed the 'movers and shakers, gritters and drivers' and their pioneering work deserves no small amount of thanks and appreciation! CBWG continue to benefit massively from their continued efforts.

Looking ahead, I am delighted to welcome Martin Staples and Robin Owen-Morley as Trustees, enabling us to maintain our full quota of 12. Martin and Robin have for some time made huge contributions to our work as secretary and Treasurer, to name but a few of their roles and I look forward to them being officially voted on at our AGM in June.

# Simon Day, Chair CBWGwildlife@gmail.com

#### 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.



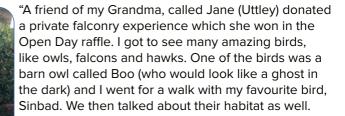
### AROUND THE RESERVE

#### Remember Open Day 2022?

Our first open day since lockdown and what a wonderful day it was! You may recall we had Shibden Valley Falconry with an amazing bird of prey display and Kevin, owner even donated a prize for the raffle. The prize turned out to be a day at the falconry with Kevin and his birds!

The lucky winner was our own Jane Uttley. Jane used to manage the Cafe in the old cabin, but then retired. She selflessly gave the prize to a family she knew in Calderdale, and here is a picture and story from Iona, the 11 year old daughter who went with parents for this special day.

(Images and story printed with the kind permission from the family).





We walked them and then we flew three of them and fed them. There were crazy birds, fidgety ones and owls with spectacular feathers. It was one of the best experiences I have ever had." Special thanks to Jane. **Iona Lewis aged 11.** 

#### Ric Jackson, member, writes:

"I first happened upon Cromwell Bottom over 10 years ago. It soon became a place I visited regularly with binoculars and a camera. Like many people, it was the birds that became the subjects of my photographs at first.

Over time, as I explored the reserve further, I realised it had more to offer than just its bird life. With or without a camera, there is a diverse range of flora and fauna to see and experience - from small bugs, bees and butterflies to the more elusive (at least to me) deer, to a huge range of flora with all its seasonal changes through the year. It's always a pleasure to see, if only for a short time in the weeks of late spring and early summer, the buttercups and other wildflowers transform the meadows into fields of gold."





Clover and Fields of Gold ~ credit Richard Jackson

#### Kirsty Collins, member, writes

"Since taking up photography six months ago me and my son Coby are still thoroughly enjoying our visits to Cromwell. In the last month or so we've had the pleasure of watching the Kingfishers fishing right in front of us at the dipping pond and down the old canal, which seemed to be the new more favourable spot away from the fast flowing river. I even got to see my first fox down at the reserve and I think you'll agree he/she was a beauty. We look forward to what other lovely wildlife we can see over the coming months as each day is a new experience."



Kingfisher (f) credit Coby
Fox credit Kirsty Collins



### TREE PLANTING ON NORTH LOOP

### Tony Spilsbury ~ Trustee

Fresh from completing the recent Lagoon coppicing work, our hardy volunteers braved the sleet and rain in mid-March to continue re-planting trees and shrubs in part of North Loop.

This part of Cromwell Bottom is higher, typically more exposed and hence quite barren in parts, so re-planting shrubs and trees is vitally important to encourage wildlife. Silver birch alone can attract well over 200 types of insects, including bees and aphids, the latter in particular supporting multiple food chains. Several volunteering teams, including Calderdale volunteering, have selectively replanted different areas so that in years to come it will attract a wider variety of wildlife and hopefully encourage more nesting birds. Our enthusiastic volunteers were proud to have planted around 150 varied trees and shrubs, including Hazel, Silver Birch, Rowan,

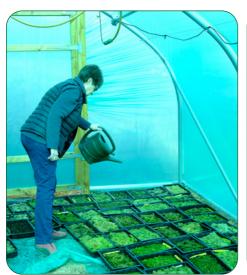
Blackthorn and Dog Rose, but slightly less proud to discover that these trees were actually council-owned and designated for a bio-diversity site elsewhere in Calderdale! Just a misunderstanding. With diplomatic relations restored, we can continue the good work in improving North Loop as a wildlife habitat and, as always, a massive thanks to our wonderful volunteers for making this happen.



### MANAGING THE SPHAGNUM TUNNEL

#### Julie Jackson ~Trustee

The Sphagnum Project is being run by Gill Wrigley from Calderdale MBC, the idea being to propagate sphagnum so it can be used to replant areas where sphagnum is disappearing from the bogs. We have got lots of mushrooming trays full of compost and media for growing sphagnum with an automatic misting system. There is a solar panel attached to the outside which charges a battery to turn on the automatic power for the misting system. Whilst Gill is on holiday volunteers are taking watering cans to the Sphagnum Tunnel to keep the trays hydrated. The water has to stand for a few days to get rid of the chlorine. The volunteers at CBWG take turns in carrying out this job to ensure that nothing has gone wrong with the system and to keep the sphagnum alive.







### BLOSSOM BY BLOSSOM THE SPRING BEGINS

### Jennifer Wolfenden

As you walk around Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve, you will find wild flowers bursting through the undergrowth. One of the earliest of these, is the Coltsfoot (below).



The Coltsfoot is a creeping perennial, flowering from February into April. The flowers are borne on upright stalks which are leafless and woolly. It grows on bare and disturbed ground and the flowers, which are 15-35mm across, are yellow.

If you find the Coltsfoot hard to spot, you really cannot miss the Marsh Marigold (below).



The Marsh Marigold grows to a height of 25cm, and is a widespread perennial with stout hollow stems. Growing in damp woodland, marshes and wet meadows, the Marsh Marigold has deep yellow flowers 25-30mm across. The plant flowers in March through to July and it is quite common here on the reserve.

Another early flowering plant which can be seen on the reserve, is the **Primrose (below).** 



The flowers of the **Primrose** are a much lighter yellow than the flowers of the Marsh Marigold. They are smaller too, with the flowers being only 2-3cm across. The flowers are borne on hairy stalks that rise above the centre of the leaf rosette. Primroses flower from February

to May and are easy to spot on the reserve.

One of the most prolific flowering plants on the reserve is the Bluebell.



The Bluebell is a bulbous perennial growing in the woodlands of the reserve. The flowers, which are a blueish purple are bell shaped and arranged on stiff stalks rising to 50cm. They flower in April to June, providing us with a dense carpet of blue each year.

Also flowering from April to May, are Ramsons. These are flowers which smell strongly of garlic and are often smelt before they are seen. They are a bulbous perennial which grows in damp woodland forming extensive carpets of flowers (see next page).

#### Ramsons (wild garlic)



All images of flowering plants are downloaded from **Unsplash. com**, a free website with no copyright and license restrictions, a site used by many graphic designers. You might want to try it out yourself if you need an image.



One of the most beautiful Spring flowering plants we have here on the reserve is the Early Purple Orchid. This is a perennial which grows in woodland and grassland. The flowers which open in April to June are pinky purple and borne on tall spikes to a height of 40cm.

Hopefully, you may be able to spot some of our Spring flowering plants as you explore Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve.

### FROLICKING FROGS AND TOADS



### Simon Day

One section of the wheelwash (in the compound area) is crammed with frogspawn, frogs and toads. They are very active at the moment and you can hear them before you see them! It takes about twelve weeks from embryo to full grown frog and up to four years to reach adulthood.

We are hoping that as they develop they will inhabit the surrounding area and boost the frog and toad population!

Ok then, the image is not one of ours nor is it up to our usual standard!

### NEST BOXES ON THE RESERVE

### Jeff Milne

As you walk around the reserve you will no doubt spot nest boxes in various locations. These have been positioned over a number of years, are of several styles, and are located to reflect the differing preferred nesting sites of different species. To monitor and maintain these there is a series of actions undertaken by volunteers each year.

At the end on the year every box is checked and emptied. This removes any old nesting material and parasites it may contain. Every box has its reference number and records are kept of which box contains either a full nest, partial nest or no nesting material. This allows us to compare results to previous years and identify any successful trends, such as height, direction the box faces, plus any boxes where no nesting attempts get recorded over several years. In this latter case consideration can be given to re-siting the box.

An important task also undertaken at this time is to remove any damaged boxes. Once these are repaired they are put back into their previous location, along with puting up any new boxes or re-siting of boxes. This task needs to be undertaken by early in the new year, as some birds can be seen checking out boxes as early as January. Boxes are sealed and not revisited during the breeding season, to avoid disturbing the birds. One exception is that some boxes will have chicks ringed. It is important to note that this ringing is not undertaken by volunteers who do the above work, but by individuals who are trained and licensed to carry out this task and who maintain the ringing records.





### PEOPLE AND NATURE

### Martin Staples ~ Visitor Centre Tues/Thurs and Trustee



Let me be honest from the outset. In writing an article about my relationship with nature I have to admit that until very recently we were barely on nodding terms. I was late to the party and it was only after I started volunteering at Cromwell Bottom, after taking early retirement, did our tentative relationship begin to blossom.

After a career in teaching, and with my spare time and holidays occupied by sport and travelling, my knowledge and understanding of the natural world was at a rather basic level. I could appreciate

the grandeur of nature on a large scale but mainly from a perspective of the surrounding landscapes I found myself in. I delighted in the magnificence of being immersed in mountain ranges, striding along coastal footpaths and ambling through rolling countryside.

However, I would have struggled, if challenged, to discuss the diverse habitats and wildlife to be found in these terrains. I could have named some of the more recognisable garden birds and taken a stab at naming a handful of trees and plants. That though is where my knowledge started and ended. I was always looking from a geographical and geological perspective, my eyes firmly fixed on the larger picture laid out before me.

And then, it changed. When I started volunteering I didn't actively choose to seek out new information. Instead, I listened to the experiences and expertise of the other volunteers and members of the public. Working within the reserve opened my eyes to the microcosm of wildlife to be discovered in the diverse habitats. With my interest piqued I began to read articles and seek out publications to further increase my fledgling knowledge. I am now more confident discussing issues pertaining to nature and wildlife, particularly with the public who call in at the Visitor Centre. My initial reaction used to be to direct any questions immediately to a nearby colleague. This is still necessary on certain occasions as I am well aware of the limitations of my knowledge.

I have a lot of catching up to do. I still love my sport and opportunities to travel. As for my relationship with nature, let's just say the awkwardness has disappeared. I have high hopes for our future.

# Henshaw's Hide

Debbie Lamb, daughter of Mike and the Late Sally Henshaw

I came from a Land down under....



On January 19th I left a sunny and hot Melbourne (35 degrees) and underwent the arduous 24+hour flight to Manchester. I landed at 5.30am faced with a temperature of zero degrees with snow on the ground. Despite the cold, I enjoyed watching the snowy landscape from the train.

I'd made this trip to see dad who'd had to cancel a planned trip to see me in November in Australia as we'd not seen each other since 2019. It was fabulous to return to my hometown and see him and my immediate family.

I also had the joy of visiting the Visitor Centre at Cromwell Bottom with dad to meet all the

fantastic volunteers caretaking the site. Imagine then my surprise to be taken up to North Loop with dad and asked to remove a strategically placed bag over a sign; a dedication to my dad of the Hide at the location, in recognition of all his efforts in bringing it about. We were both overwhelmed with such an honour and a tear or two was shed. I can't tell you how much it meant to me to be there for the unveiling. It was a privilege and humbling. 'Henshaw's Hide' will be forever in my heart and a place to visit on my next trip. Dad loves Cromwell Bottom and it holds a special place in my heart even more now after this dedication. I spent many hours in the area as a child when it was the gravel pits so to see it as it is today is inspiring.



I want to also give recognition to all the wonderful members of this conservation group and the hours of selfless dedication to the site and centre. I hope that around the reserve, more dedications will be made to those who've given so much to create this beautiful community space.

Mike with David Langley, Jt. Vice Chair of CBWG.

### SPRING - A SEASON OF CHANGE

#### Allan Wolfenden ~ Trustee

I love the season of spring. It's a wonderful time of the year when so much is occurring around us. Visually and audibly we are presented with sights and sounds that should thrill and excite us. Therefore, it's a great time to be exploring the reserve at Cromwell Bottom. It is thrilling to witness and experience the rapid changes that Spring immerses us in. As the sun gets warmer and days become longer, as light begins to win the battle over darkness, nature responds. All around the reserve, throughout this remarkable season, life is on the move. Spring is the season when things happen.

Early starters

As I walked around the reserve in February I was struck by how many early signs spring was presenting. The herons were busy beginning to collect twigs and branches as they set about rebuilding their nests, just off the reserve but visible for all to see. On those warmer, end of winter days, they could be seen in the lagoon and other wet areas on the reserve looking for any hapless frog, toad or newt that had ended its time of hibernation. early. Walking around the reserve in mid-February I was delighted to hear and watch a solitary song thrush. Having taken it's place high in a tree, it sang continuously, announcing to the world (and any female song thrushes within hearing distance of his musical

repertoire) that winter was finally fading and spring was about to become a reality.

Spring is a time of great, and at times rapid change. The long silence of winter is broken by the sound of birdsong. This is, after all, the season for singing, declaring your presence and announcing your territory.



### Singing Specialists

Spring is a time when Warblers return to the reserve to start the next generation. Chiff-chaffs, Willow warblers, Garden Warblers, Whitethroats, Reed warblers, Blackcaps can all be seen and heard around the reserve. Many of these birds are very plain to look at.

Some of them can be challenging to identify. But, what they lack in looks they make up in the repertoire of musical finesse. Why not get up early one morning and take time to listen to the Dawn Chorus?

#### High fliers

Other birds to look out for are the high fliers. Swallows, Sand and House Martins and Swifts. These birds delight us with their aerial acrobatics as they feed on tiny insects high above us. Take a few moments as you watch them, delight yourself in their aerial skills, but also think of the long and hazardous journey they will have made to get here. Coming all the way from southern Africa they will have flown across the Sahara Desert, crossed open sea and faced countless challenges.



Why do they do it? Why take on the risk or expound all that energy? They do it to breed. They too are here to create the next generation, and some, like those Swifts that we see from May onwards, will be scything through the air, powered by their scimitar shaped wings. They feed, mate and even sleep on the wing. The only time they land is to nest, lay eggs and have young. They do not have much time. Having arrived in early May,m by August they will be making their return journey. Perhaps, like me, you will take a moment to celebrate their return and wish them well for the future.

#### Interesting insects

It's not just birds that delight us in spring. It as if the earth itself has thrown off its winter coat and come alive. Trees come into bud and leaf. Flowers begin to bloom. Look out for Primroses, Birdsfoot Trefoil and Orchids on the reserve. Our ponds awaken with the sound of croaking frogs looking to find mates and spawn. The reserve comes alive with colour. In these warmer days and nights, insects, amphibians and bats respond by becoming more active.



On early spring days, when the sun is warm, those butterflies that had overwintered stir into action.



Orange tip (m) credit Mike Henshaw



Look out for Peacock and Small Tortoise butterflies feeding on newly flowered dandelions and other flowering plants. Others, that survived the winter as eggs laid on appropriate nursery plants, hatch into caterpillars. Orange Tip butterflies can be seen from April. The male, with its distinctive orange tipped wings, can be seen patrolling its territory, darting among the flowers to feed and await a mate.

As you admire the flowers of Blackthorn and Hawthorn and enjoy the latter's distinctive scent, look out for what may be making the most of the

nectar they provide. What is that bee you are looking at? What is that insect that looks so odd? As you look, let your questions turn to wonder and your wonder to delight

.... it's SPRING!

# BROOKFOOT WETLAND CONSERVATION PROJECT - UPDATE Shelagh Brooke, Robin Dalton

The progress of this conservation project, which represents a collaboration between Calderdale Council and Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group (CBWG), has been regularly reported upon in previous newsletters. The purpose of the project is to halt and reverse the natural drying out of the Brookfoot lagoon, reedbed, and wet woodlands. It formed one part of the wider Brighouse Flood Alleviation Scheme, for which matched funding had been secured by the Council and the Environment Agency (EA) from the European Structural and Investment Fund.

Plans were in place to carry out engineering works to re-route overflow water from the Calder and Hebble Navigation through the Brookfoot wetland. Productive negotiations with relevant statutory bodies had been undertaken, and it was anticipated that the works involved would be completed by May 2023. Those involved were thus very disappointed to learn, at the beginning of this year, that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had rejected a recovery plan presented by the EA, and that funding had been withdrawn.

Members of the Project Steering Group, and the CBWG Trustees remain fully committed to the project, and will explore alternative sources of funding. As you can see from the next article, much work continues to be carried out in the lagoon and reedbed basin to ensure that this area is conserved by as many different appropriate means as possible.

### WORK AT THE LAGOON

Tony spilsbury ~ Trustee



2023 has seen significant volunteer work in the lagoon area, in particular to remove encroaching coppice which has progressed over the past 2-3 years since covid inhibited active management of the lagoon reedbed. It's important to manage the lagoon in

this way to protect against the incursion of trees and scrub which, if left, would have a long-term detrimental effect on the reed bed and the birds which depend upon it for breeding and feeding.

The work being carried out by CBWG volunteers, CMBC staff and external contractors is part of a long term plan to protect the lagoon as a wild-life habitat. Coppicing also allows flowering plants and grasses to grow, providing food for insects which in turn provides food for other animals such as birds and bats.

As you can see from the photos, we have been using the coppice to make many fascines, which are dormant branch cuttings bound together into long cylindrical bundles and placed in shallow trenches on slopes to reduce erosion and shallow sliding.

Fascines are used to protect banks from washout and seepage, particularly at the edge of a lagoon or stream, where water levels fluctuate moderately.

A significant part of the lagoon has now been cleared thanks to the hard work from our amazing volunteers. It's been a race against time to ensure we don't disturb our wildlife during the nesting season. On that point, we would respectfully ask visitors to the reserve to keep their dogs on their leashes and not enter the lagoon or woodlands where birds will be nesting from March onwards.

Finally, a massive word of thanks to everyone who has worked hard to revitalise the lagoon; anyone stopping at the viewing area will now see an uninterrupted view of this lovely natural habitat within Cromwell Bottom reserve.



Volunteers Alan, Allan, Paul, Chris images credit Tony Spilsbury

### HOW WE ARE FUNDED

### Margaret Conroy, fundraising volunteer

Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group is thriving and as the group has grown so have our ambitions, bringing with them the inevitable need for money to enhance the habitats on the reserve, provide equipment for volunteers, maintain hospitality facilities and put on events.

Our most regular income comes from the general public – donating generously week by week as they enjoy using the visitor centre. Volunteers also give talks and slide shows to local groups for which we receive donations.

Behind the scenes we need substantial funds to undertake major projects and we apply for grants for these larger amounts. Over the past decade we have gained individual grants of between £1000 and £30,000 from a range of sources, including:

**AVIVA Community Fund** 

Calderdale Council Small Grants Scheme

Community Fund for Calderdale

Postcode Local Trust

The Fort Foundation

National Lottery - Rastrick Big Local

**Brighouse Ladies Circle** 

#### Staying Well

They have provided a wide range of benefits - bat detectors, a tractor, the pond dipping and viewing platforms, sand martin wall, marquees for our open day, our new visitor centre building, as well as materials for path maintenance, disability access, publicity ...... the list is almost endless.

Thank you to all of our funders. Your support is invaluable.







### SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

Simon Day

One of our key objectives at CBWG is to engage with local schools and community groups, by providing opportunities for guided walks and educational experiences which seek to increase visitors' interest in and knowledge about what the reserve has to offer.

#### Schools

Local schools now organise regular visits with us, more so than ever before, to take part in a range of activities including pond dipping, minibeast hunting, wildlife walks, forest school activities, geography/history based study and bird watching. We have been visited for an organised activity regularly since October 2022 and the diary is close to full for a weekly visit until the start of the school summer holidays.

For further information on bookings, please contact **CBWGwildlife@gmail.com** 

Learning about Ducks and Ponds



Following the Bee Trail



### Community

Our commitment to being inclusive remains. We continue to be visited fortnightly by staff and residents from Cygnet Lodge and are always delighted to host visits from Access Calderdale and individuals with disabilities. The reserve is almost fully accessible by wheelchair and we have accessible toilet facilities.

### Calderdale College project

CBWG were delighted to be involved, once again, with Media Studies dept from Calderdale College to support the 2nd year students with their project. The students visited the reserve, spoke to some of our volunteers, took photos and generated their ideas for how they were going to incorporate the natural beauty of the nature reserve, into their own projects. It was clear from the start that the students had very good working relationships, which ultimately showed in the quality and variety of the merchandise they created. The results are absolutely stunning! The variety of designs, colour schemes and quality are exceptional and it has been no surprise that the items are selling fast!

This has always been a 'win, win' situation. It's of equal importance to us that we support the students towards their qualification, along with the financial benefits to our charity. It has been a pleasure to see the finished products of which the students, not to mention the college staff, should be rightly proud! We would be delighted to continue this partnership in future years.

#### Calderdale College Media Studies students with tutor, Suzanne Griffiths



### Items of merchandise available in the Visitor Centre



### Walking group taking part in the Rastrick 'Pole to Pole' challenge



#### In memorium ...

We were honoured to receive a very generous donation for £5000 from the will of the late Margaret Perrott.

Margaret lived in Lightcliffe for 50 years. Margaret and her husband Graham often enjoyed visiting Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve, and so it was one of her wishes that a gift was included in her Will. The kind donation will be spent thoughtfully and respectfully on enhancing facilities around the reserve.

#### Margaret Perrott pictured with Graham



## FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER CHRIS LATHAM









## CRYPTIC BIRD QUIZ

answers in the Visitor Centre or email CBWGwildlife@gmail.com

1	Out of breath
2	Noted for wisdom
3	A dog shows pleasure
4	Scarlet flying toy
5	A pebble and a gossip
6	A barber uses it before presenting
7	Push under the water
8	Arthur's advisor
9	Grumble
10	Bird of peace
11	Pretty average rubbish
12	Let it all hang out for the festival
13	Golden mallet
14	Crazy
15	Machine for raising weights
16	Lick up beside a side piece
17	Treasure on the peak
18	Sticky paper
19	Stealing
20	He designed a cathedral
21	A castle in chess
22	Royal angler
23	Sailors dislike it

