

Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER

Spring/
Summer
2022



Nuthatch
Credit Allan Wolfenden



contact the newsletter team
newsletter.cbwg@gmail.com



CALDER
GREENING
PROJECT

contact the trustees
cromwellbottom@gmail.com



Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust

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CHAIR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2022 newsletter from the Wildlife Group, we have all sorts of original articles in this edition for your enjoyment! To highlight a few, we have an article about a Sphagnum Project with which we are involved,

articles about our links with local organisations that promote mental health, and how Cromwell Bottom is increasingly becoming a venue for people to explore, post Covid. We are very excited to be working with Media Studies students at Calderdale College and they are giving us resources to use with the public. Huddersfield Uni have been busy with a project sampling the quality of water on Tag Loop. We have had a PR event at Morrison's in Elland where we were asking shoppers what they would like to see at the Nature Reserve going forward, and what would it take for them to come and visit us here. We are also actively involved with Old Earth Primary School, they have been bird-watching and bulb planting on the reserve. We have been applying for grants to help fund our bird feeders and bird food, and other bits and pieces around the reserve. We are involved with Community Groups, particularly the Active Partnership which link with the Stay Well Service, the Better Living Service, ACDAF (which is a service for people in wheelchairs in Calderdale) to facilitate their becoming actively involved in visiting the nature reserve.

Our aim is to branch out to support many different groups post-Covid, as well as maintaining the reserve. Our volunteers have built a new pond in the compound area and we look forward to it being put into use this summer! The Wildlife Group would like to thank you all very much for your membership, involvement and support. Read on!



(If online please
click logo)
or
[https://active.
calderdale.gov.uk](https://active.calderdale.gov.uk)



SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS

Hi, my name is Jennifer. You may have seen me litter picking at Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve on Thursday mornings. Before I volunteered at the reserve, I used to visit the cabin with a friend on a Sunday for refreshments, before walking through to Brighthouse on the canal towpath..



During the Covid crisis, not only were our walks curtailed, but my only sister died too. Times like these leave a big hole in one's life and these must be filled if we are to enjoy the rest of our lives. When the nature reserve reopened after the relaxation of Covid restrictions, I decided to join the volunteers on their Thursday work day. The volunteers are a great group of people with many varied interests. Indeed, conversations on a Thursday can readily range from bee keeping through to the installation of a chicken coop. As a litter picker, it's just great to be outside in the fresh air, even on a really cold day. As yet, I haven't found any buried treasure. Unfortunately, it's the usual items every week – doggy bags, food wrappers and antiseptic wipes. Oh, and at one time, a ceramic toilet!

AROUND THE RESERVE

We are building a new pond!



Over the last couple of months CBWG volunteers have been working to build a new wildlife pond within the compound. This is part of the continuation of developing the educational provision working with Calderdale Council. Following the excavation, and removal of stones etc, the base was prepared and pond liner was put down. Work is now currently being undertaken on the adjacent banking with removal of lots of rubble and materials from previous site usage.

Future work to be undertaken on the pond area is likely to include a platform at the bottom on the banking to facilitate pond dipping once the pond gets further established. The banking will be planted at a later stage to finish off the area. At present the pond has filled with the recent rain but has not yet had any plant material added. Given the close proximity of newts and frogs and other insects, the pond should naturally develop its own pond life, so we will watch closely as this develops. You might just see the resident duck who has just moved in!

Pheasants have moved in! Mike Henshaw

The first observation was a male on North Loop and in subsequent visits a female was located in the same area. Following further observations from myself and others we have come to the conclusion that we have 3 females and 2 males. They are roaming freely throughout the reserve, including all feeding areas, and outside the reserve to the pallet yard and beyond. They seem to be making their main stay place over in the woods, opposite the cabins in the compound. Hopefully later this year we will see some young pheasants around the reserve.

We think they are escapees like any other birds - in winter they start moving around looking for food, dropped on Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve where there is a plentiful supply of food on the ground from bird feeders, and made it their home! They are busy mating at the moment!



More goings-on around the Reserve!

Goosander on the Weir credit Dave Haggas



Please send us your pictures to feature in the next edition!

Work continues around the pond next to Dipping Platform ready for summer ...



Building a new Rockery - Alan Pullan



Allan (volunteer), Julie (Trustee) and Chris (Volunteer) have built up a rockery in the space opposite the Cabin, from a pile of really good quality soil which had been collected previously. A small wall was built at the front as the area is sometimes prone to flooding, filled and levelled off to protect the plants. Work is going on to build another at the other side of the footpath for balance.

We have planted a wide range of Alpine plants which will give a lot of colour over the season. In addition we have created drainage in the soil with gravel, which is just the sort of environment that Alpines need.

We hope you look forward to watching the plants develop through the season.

MOTH NIGHTS AT THE RESERVE

Dan Buckle.

For the last few years, regular moth trapping on the reserve has provided us with a valuable snapshot of our resident moth population. Typically, moth nights are held every two weeks, which over the course of a year, allows us to see seasonal variation in species abundance.

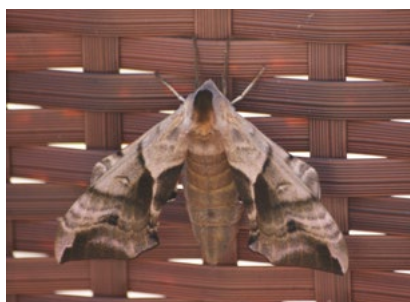
We employ three main methods of catching and observing moths. Light traps, sugaring, and the good old fashioned 'walking around with a torch and net to see what we find'.

- A light trap works on the same principle as a lobster pot - moths can get in, but find it much harder to get back out. It consists of a light which attracts the moths and a box for them to fall into. Egg boxes placed in the box provide shelter where moths can safely rest before being counted and released. We'll usually stand near the light trap to catch passing moths in nets - many will fly near the trap without falling in, and quite often some will land and rest on the floor nearby.

- Sugaring involves painting a syrupy mixture of treacle, fermented fruit and hard liquor onto trees or posts - many moths can't resist. Periodic walks in the woods to check the sugar will often reveal species that tend not to be attracted to light.

- Walking around with a torch and net may sound laborious, but can significantly add to the night's catch. Some female moths are flightless, with reduced or absent wings, and are rarely seen at light traps. They can be found on tree trunks releasing pheromones, which attract the passing males. Without careful searching, these females can easily go unnoticed. Moths can also be observed nectaring on flowers.

Once caught, the moths are observed, identified, recorded and released. Occasionally we might just find a new species to add to the Cromwell Bottom list
The species list can be found on our website - cromwellbottomlnr.co.uk

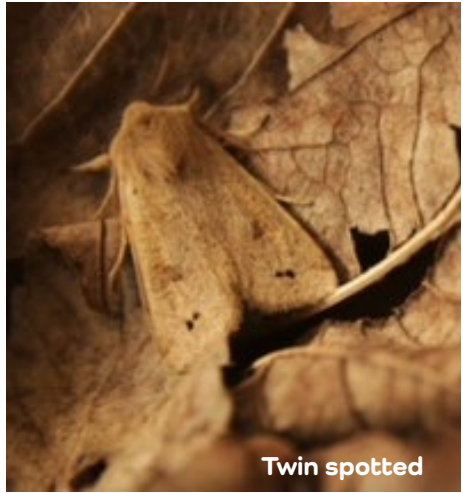


left - Elephant Hawk Moth and
Hawk Moth Caterpillar
credit Mike Henshaw

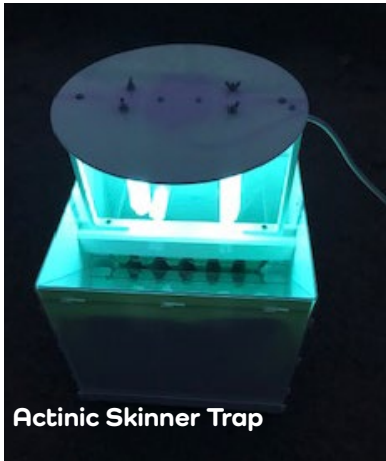




Oak moth



Twin spotted



Actinic Skinner Trap



Applying the sugar



Saturday night at the Moth Trap

Images credit Dan Buckle



PEOPLE AND NATURE



Who's the new guy?? Geoff Spedding

I've just added myself to the company of Volunteers at CBWG thanks to a chance meeting between my wife and a former colleague - current chair, Simon Day...over a coffee...outside the Cabin.

So am I interested in Bird-watching? Conservation? Site Development? Woodland management? Working in the open air? Yes to all!! So maybe this will be a good fit for me!

A couple of glimpses of what I've been doing in recent years (since retirement from C/E Ministry)...

My wife and I took on her parents' house - a windswept Barn conversion, 1000ft up on the Pennines with a 'garden' that Monty Don has taught us to call a "Mowed Field"! I've always been a gardener, so I took on the challenge. Over 10 years, I've erected a paling fence all round, to protect a 600-plant hedge from the wind. In turn the hedge shields my plants and shrubs and somehow they survive and flower and produce veg and fruit. But the pay-off, more than potatoes or greens or roses or sweet peas has been the wildlife colonising the space. I've worked organically and believe that has resulted into a broad balance between plants and bugs...and birds! So now we have 8 species actually nesting on site in and around the hedge row as well as some dozens of species that use the vegetation and feed off worms and bugs and flies. Star visitors have been Whitethroat, Redwing, and Long-tailed tit. My other garden is in Greece! Again 1000ft up on the Pilion mountain

on the Aegean coast in a Chestnut forest broken up by orchards of apple pear and cherry, and lemon and orange and olive groves. In 2012, I went as a general Volunteer to a holistic workshop centre, and found they were looking for someone to develop an organic vegetable garden to produce at least some of the veg for participants. Our policy is always to offer something from the garden at lunch and evening meal. In 6 weeks of May and early June I lead a team to plant up about 100sq m with tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, basil, coriander, dill, oregano, salads, brassicas, chards, cucumber, courgette, squashes and more. We have apples, cherries, kiwis, pomegranate, walnuts too. At a rough estimate, the garden yields about £1000 worth of produce each summer. Google www.kalikalos.org to see lots of detail: come and visit!!

So that's a couple of ways I keep out of mischief! To which I now add

Volunteering with CBWG - see you here!

TOADS ON ROADS

Margaret Conroy

At Cromwell Bottom lots of different things spark your interest in the natural world. The variety of plant life, birds, fungi or amphibians all have their fans. For me, getting to know more about pond life through our newt nights and pond dipping sessions has been great fun. It led me to discover our local toad patrol. Toads don't necessarily live close to water all year round, but in Spring they emerge from hibernation and make their way to "ancestral ponds," so called because over time many generations of toads have returned to the same ponds to breed. Unfortunately our modern lifestyle has reduced the number of these ponds, and also means that their traditional routes to those that remain are sometimes interrupted by housing, industry, roads and motorways. Here some of the slow moving toads are accidentally squashed by unwary, fast moving motorists. They often start moving at dusk.

The charity **Froglife** has loads of information and runs the Toads on Roads project. www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads.



Every Spring small armies of volunteers all round the country spend a few evenings out in the dark, with buckets, hi-vis jackets and torches. We collect the toads at road edges, count them, and carry them to safety closer to their ponds where they are released to start the next generation.

Can anyone do it? If you're happy in the dark, dealing with traffic and can offer a few hours, yes you can! When does it happen? Most of the migration locally seems to happen in the second half of March. The weather plays an important part – mild evenings and damp, humid air encourages the toads to set forth, so we sometimes have to react at short notice.

Where? There are several registered sites in Calderdale: I volunteer at Brighouse on Thornhills Beck Lane at the far end of Wellholme Park.

If you know of other spots where toads cross at their peril please get in touch with Froglife, or contact me via the wildlife group.

Our leader Chris Tindal co-ordinates our efforts and submits the results to Froglife who monitor the national picture and advise planners on how to help these little creatures survive and thrive.

This year 5 volunteers took part and the total count at Thornhills was 215 live toads and only 10 casualties.



LAGOON AND REEDBED CONSERVATION PROJECT

Robin Dalton and Shelagh Brooke

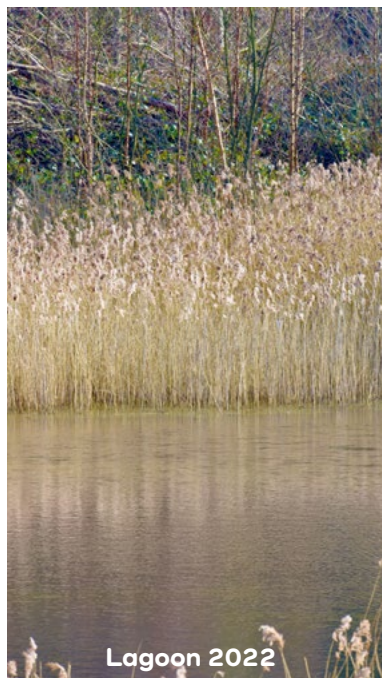
Introduction

In the Spring 2021 Newsletter, there was an article about this project that described the ecological importance of the Cromwell Bottom lagoon and reedbed and its surrounding wetland areas (which are located in a part of the Reserve known as Brookfoot Loop). It emphasised that wetlands such as reedbeds,

if left undisturbed, will naturally dry out and become converted to woodland. It described how Calderdale Council and Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group had been working collaboratively to conserve and enhance this part of the Reserve, some of the many complexities associated with this project, and what had been achieved up to that point.



Lagoon winter 2018 and summer 2019 image credits Allan Wolfenden



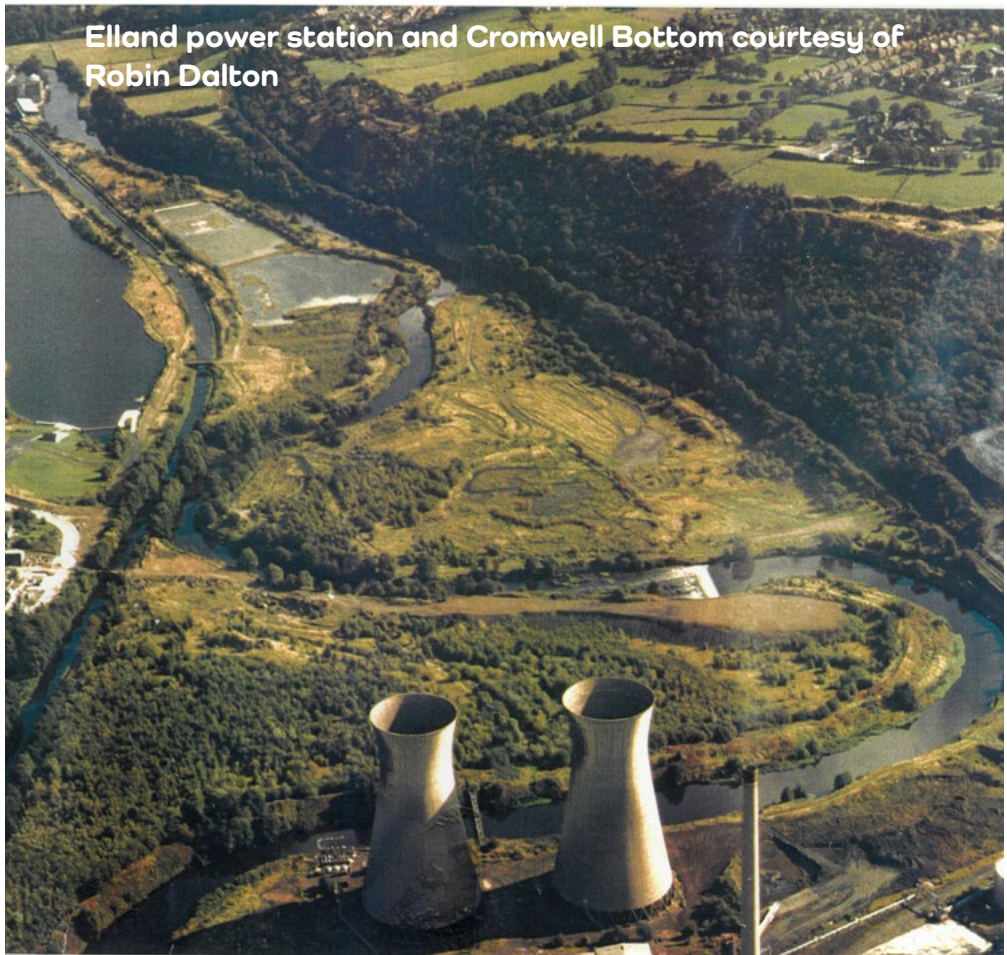
Lagoon 2022

This seems to be a good time to provide a little more background information, details of the further progress that has been made, and the thinking about 'the next phase'. Currently conservation work (which will involve the careful import of water into the site) is feasible because of funding secured by Calderdale Council from the European Regional Development Fund for the Brighouse Flood Alleviation Scheme. (The resultant catchment improvement projects that are taking place around Brighouse involve a partnership between Calderdale Council, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and the Environment Agency.)

Background Information: A History of Disturbance.

The Reserve has established on land that has been subject to complex disturbances over decades.

During the 1950s and 1960s the glacial gravels present were extracted for the building industry, and then in the 1960s to early 1990s the resultant gravel pits were infilled with coal washery and Pulverised Fuel Ash (PFA) from the coal-fired Elland Power Station. After the partial extraction of the PFA on Brookfoot Loop, the remaining sludge lagoons developed into a mosaic of wetland and open water habitats. These include the large open water lagoon, the reedbed, wet woodland, and the lowland 'sphagnum bog' with its very rare combination of Sphagnum species. (The sphagnum bog was highlighted in an article in the last Newsletter.) All of these habitats combine to support regionally important flora and fauna.



This area is also important as a flood storage area, impounding water from the River Calder during severe flooding events.

Importing Water to Conserve the Brookfoot Loop Wetlands.

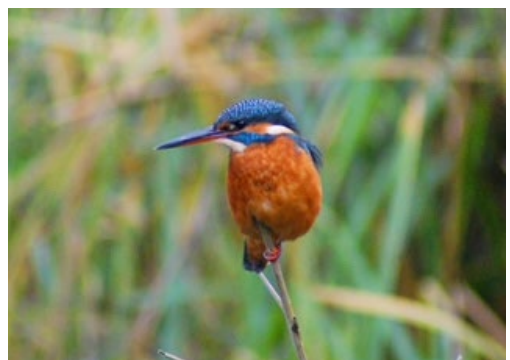
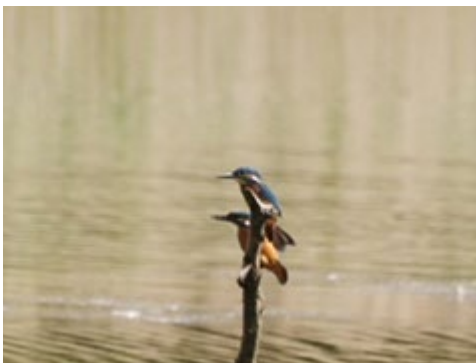
As already identified, as the consequence of natural processes the Brookfoot Loop site is drying up, a phenomenon that is particularly apparent in the summer months. Loss of these wetland communities would pose a threat to many species of conservation concern, including rare invertebrates. The aim of the conservation project is to halt and reverse this drying out, and thus to support the conservation of over 3 hectares of wetland habitats. (Reedbeds, for example, rely on permanently wet or waterlogged sites, and healthy growth requires a reliable and predictable water regime.) The Brookfoot Loop wetlands are surrounded by the River Calder, the Calder and Hebble Navigation, and the neighbouring water-ski and fishing lakes, so there are several potential options available to provide a source for the import of water into Brookfoot Loop. A wide range of surveys and reports commissioned by Calderdale Council, including from this last year an Ecological Impact Assessment, and an Outline Water Level Management Plan,

indicate that the two preferred options as water sources would be the canal, and the river.

A sluice or weir under the bridge in the bund lying to the east of the lagoon would be required to maintain the appropriate water levels in the lagoon and reedbed. At an earlier stage of the project, some excavation and creation of islands within the lagoon basin was considered, but, for various reasons, this is not now going to be included as part of the current conservation programme.

At the moment, consultations are taking place with those authorities that would need to give their permission for either of the 'preferred options' for the import of water. Opportunities will become available to ensure all interested parties have an opportunity to review the proposals and comment.

Further project progress reports will be included in future Newsletters. In the meantime, very many thanks to all of those individuals and organisations who have contributed to the project to date.



Kingfishers on the Lagoon credit Mike Henshaw

Buzzard

Mick Sharpe,
featured
photographer



Grey Wagtail



Goldcrest



Siskin



CALDERDALE SPHAGNUM PROJECT

Gillian Wrigley

Growing Moss for the Love of Peat - The Calderdale Sphagnum Project.

Sphagnum is a magic moss. Simply put, it acts as a wet blanket for peatland.

When peatland is wet it stores carbon. Most of Britain's peatland is not wet enough and is currently releasing carbon that has been held for thousands of years. The unique structure of sphagnum allows it to hold 20 times its weight in water. It holds this water onto the peat and raises the watertable. The wet, acidic conditions created by the sphagnum prevents dead plants from rotting. As the sphagnum ages, the base of the sphagnum dies but does not rot and over 100s of years it builds peat.

Its amazing water retaining capacity makes it an important tool in natural flood management projects and by keeping peatland wet, it improves the accessibility of invertebrates and so the breeding success of many moorland bird species such as dunlin and golden plover.

The Calderdale sphagnum project is a 4 year citizen science project funded by the Climate Action Fund of the National Lottery. The aim is to find inexpensive, easy ways to grow sphagnum. Later on in the project the sphagnum will be planted on local suitable sites to assist in natural flood management and carbon capture.

On 25th January 2022 in freezing fog, a group of countryside volunteers including some of the Cromwell Bottom Wildlife group went out with the wardens at the Kirklees side of RSPB

Dovestone to collect three different species of sphagnum. Sphagnum capillifolium rubellum pictured, is more drought resistant than most, which can grow on slopes and under heather. We were delighted to be permitted to collect this species as it is scarce in Calderdale and an important species for peat building.

To date we have had 3 days of propagating by volunteers at Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve. Once the plants are propagated they are moved to the protective environment of Manor Heath Nurseries. We are currently looking into the feasibility of a polytunnel at Cromwell Bottom so that the volunteers can oversee more of the growing and record keeping.

We are currently trialling growing sphagnum with 5 different peat free growing materials. We are trialling growing-on of whole plants and of cutting the plants into pieces. If you are interested in getting involved in the Calderdale Sphagnum project or would like for me to come and talk to your group or school you can contact me at gillian.wrigley@calderdale.gov.uk.



Volunteers planting Sphagnum in trays

EDUCATION LINKS with Old Earth Primary School, Huddersfield University and Calderdale College

- update Simon Day

CBWG are committed to supporting local schools in a variety of outdoor activities which support or enhance their curriculum.

We have created a designated Education Area specifically for this purpose, which schools can book for activities such as bug hunting, birdwatching, pond dipping and, for those schools who have the expertise, forest school activities.

There is no charge for this provision, but a donation towards the work of the wildlife group would be most welcome. The area is not open to the public, but visits and further information can be arranged by contacting Simon Day, Chair of CBWG email: swday1985@gmail.com

Visitors to the reserve are welcome to request a short tour of the area but must be accompanied by a member preferably on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

Old Earth Primary School, Elland are regular visitors. Recently, classes have visited us to do such activities as spring bulb planting and birdwatching

We also have links with Calderdale College, in particular their media studies dept. We are soon to receive a range of stunning resources from the current cohort of college students which can be made available to schools.

Students from Huddersfield University have visited the reserve to begin a survey of water quality on Tag Cut.



Old Earth Priiary pupils bulb planting



... and bird watching.

read an account of the visit by the pupils themselves on the next page!

Our visits to Cromwell Bottom Year 4 Old Earth School

We had an amazing time at Cromwell Bottom this week when we went bird watching. The volunteers taught us lots about the different types of birds and helped us to pick them out when they were well camouflaged. We have done some writing and artwork about kingfishers so we were desperate to see one, however all the rain seemed to have put them off!

On our visit we were lucky to see 18 different species of birds. There were dunnocks, robins, nuthatches, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, reed buntings, bullfinches, chaffinches, wood pigeons, magpies, cormorants, herons, mallards, jays and carrion crows. We even saw a flock of rare pink footed geese which even the volunteers got excited about!

We are really looking forward to going back to Cromwell Bottom in the Summer and have voted it a 5 star experience. We would recommend other people to take a walk there and enjoy the nature that is right on our doorstep.

COMMUNITY LINKS

Simon Day

CBWG are an integral partner in the recently established 'Active Partnership' a group of organisations whose aim is signposting and supporting people in mental health, well-being and addressing isolation in the wake of COVID lockdown.

Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve is geographically in the middle of the Calder Lower Valley, and such is ideally placed to provide a safe and pleasant environment for groups and individuals to explore, enjoy and find a place of peace. Our cabin and outdoor seating provide an area for people to socialise, enjoy refreshments, hospitality and receive information about what the Reserve has to offer.

To date, representatives from **Staying Well, Better Living Service, Access Calderdale, Elland Children's Centre, Cygnet Lodge, NHS social prescribing**

link workers and St Augustine's Refugee Centre have enjoyed guided visits to the reserve, with the likelihood of future organised visits for the people whom they support.

The Staying Well Service recently awarded us a grant of almost £4000 to support us in our projects to improve wildlife habitats, the outdoor cabin area, provide accessible picnic tables, new signage, plants, consumables and funding for some of our publications.

We have attended and provided information stalls at the following **Active Partnership events:**

Morrisons, Elland, Space Community Centre, Field Lane, Rastrick and a Community 'get together' at St John's Church, Rastrick. We have a couple of photos from various events for you to enjoy on the next page!

COMMUNITY EVENTS - the pics! Simon Day



Active Partnership visit



Community get-together St Johns Church, Rastrick



Children from St Augustine's Refugee Centre, Halifax - busy filling bird feeders



Visit from St Augustine's Refugee Centre, Halifax

The Gruffalo

"The Gruffalo is a British children's picture book by writer and playwright Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, that tells the story of a mouse, the protagonist of the book, taking a walk in the woods. The book has sold over 13 million copies, has won several prizes for children's literature, and has been developed into plays on both the West End and Broadway and even an Oscar nominated animated film". *Wikipedia*.

The sessions that were held at Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve were run by Gillian Rice and staff from Halifax Children's Library and aimed at 2-5 yr olds. The children made the Gruffalo masks in the morning and went round the Reserve on a Gruffalo Trail finding different pictures of the gruffalo and ticking off their list when they spotted them! They had a thoroughly good time and so did the volunteers who were assisting on the day! As for The Gruffalo, we can only assume that Simon was thrilled to play the part!



Gillian (Hx Libraries) and Simon!



SPREADING THE WORD IN MORRISONS

Lynda Orchard



In February this year a few volunteers had the chance to promote the reserve by talking to customers at Morrisons in Elland. We had a display of information about Cromwell Bottom stationed near the checkouts. We wanted to find out if people had heard about the reserve and if they ever visited.. There seemed to be three responses: those who knew about it and visited regularly, those who had heard of it and had intended to visit and those who were unaware of its existence.

We handed out information leaflets containing contact details and encouraged people to come down and take a look. The most positive responses were generally from families with young children. They particularly liked the activities on offer, especially pond dipping. More such promotion activities are planned for the future.



SPRING IS COMING

by Jennifer Wolfenden

Spring is coming,
Winter is waning,
See the first shoots of Spring.
Snowdrop white,
Primrose yellow,
Trees green.

Sunny days make the day,
We leave the fog behind us,
Gone are the dark, dismal days,
Gone, gone forever.
Let's look forward to better weather!



Newsletter Team YouTube Channel
click to go or google YouTube Bruce
Hoyle.



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