



WOOLSTON EYES NEWSLETTER March 2021

It is just over a year since our last Newsletter to permit holders, and what a year it has been! The pandemic has had a major impact on all our lives; for some much more than others. During the first lockdown the WECG Committee followed Government guidelines and closed the Reserve to all visitors for most of the spring and summer. It was only when infection rates and deaths began to fall in the autumn that we welcomed permit holders back on a restricted basis of no more than four people in the Morgan Hide at any one time and limits, as well, in all the other hides. Hand gel was placed in all the hides and distancing rules expected. Predictably, visitors were slow to return but those that did observed the regulations and behaved well. Sadly, the second wave of infections was worse than the first, but WECG decided not to close the Reserve, although the restrictions were kept in place. However, with the success of the vaccination programme and the Prime Minister's plans to ease restrictions slowly we hope that some kind of normality will return in the coming months.

Wildlife on the Eyes

As a result of fewer people visiting the Reserve the number of records received in 2020 was much reduced. Even so, the Black-necked Grebes had a successful breeding season, with many young fledged. Recent data for 2018 from the Rare Breeding Bird Panel shows that Woolston Eyes and a wetland in Yorkshire were holding 50% of the very small national population of about 50 pairs. For those interested in rarities, a Tundra Bean Goose in January and two overflying Cattle Egrets in October were new species for the Eyes, while four Cranes were seen flying west just to the north of No.1 bed. Other highlights were up to 50,000 Starlings roosting on No.3 bed and, for the first time, up to 3,000 Pink-footed Geese also roosted on No.3 bed. During the day they fed on stubble fields near Lymm.

With spring almost here the wetland on No.3 bed has never looked better. Summer migrants will soon be arriving, including the Black-necked Grebes – it is still not known where they spend the winter. In the last week of February a drake Garganey, our only summer visiting duck, was seen on No.3 bed for three days; the second earliest record ever at Woolston.

Reserve Management

Many of you will be aware of the continuing wetland creation on No.4 bed, the large former deposit ground west of No.3 bed. Our contractor Steve Fletcher and his team have completed Phase 1 of the development, which is already attracting good numbers of wildfowl and waders. The progress they have made is remarkable, given the very wet last six months of 2020 and the second wettest January ever in the history of the Eyes at the beginning of this year. As this is a working site Health and Safety regulations mean that permit holders are currently not allowed access on to No.4 bed, but we will keep you updated as discussions progress with the landowner, Peel Holdings. Unfortunately, although there is no Right of Way on to No.4, a number of dog walkers and others are ignoring this and some have been causing much disturbance to birds using the new wetland. We intend to engage with these people to try and resolve this situation, which threatens to undermine the great potential of one of the largest new wetlands in the north of England.

Permitted paths on No.3 bed

We should like to welcome new permit holders to Woolston Eyes, many of whom have joined in recent weeks. We hope you will enjoy your visits to a Reserve which is a jewel in Warrington's

Crown and of national, and at times, international importance for a number of species. When you received your first permit you were provided with a map of No.3 bed with the permitted paths that take you to the hides. It is important to keep to the paths and observe signs marked 'No Access' Some people have recently been seen walking into areas that could cause disturbance to sensitive breeding birds and pose a real danger to themselves. If you have lost or mislaid the leaflet a map of No.3 bed is included with this Newsletter together with a map of the whole Reserve. Similar maps can be found on our website, www.woolston.eyes.com in the FAQ section. Please note that the hide marked '8' on the attached map for No.3 bed is for use by the Wardens only for studying and monitoring purposes.

Bird ringing at Woolston Eyes

Bird ringing has played an important role in monitoring survival, productivity, population changes and migration patterns of the birds at Woolston Eyes since 1980. It is data from ringing and other surveying methods that allows policies to be made to help conservation. During the forty-one years that the ringing team has been working as volunteers at the Reserve they have ringed 174,000 birds of 112 species. All the ringers are members of the Merseyside Ringing Group and are licenced by the British Trust or Ornithology.

As you are walking around the paths on No.3 bed you will probably see what appear to be paths cut through the vegetation that lead from the main circular route around the hides. You will probably see poles standing vertically in these 'paths'. These are the rides in which the ringing team sets mist nets in order to catch the birds to ring them. These are **not** permissive paths. If you do accidentally find yourself by a net pole please return the way you have come and re-join the main path. Mist nest are very easily damaged, are vital to our work and an expense that the ringers cover themselves. The ringing team checks the nets regularly to remove birds that have been caught. They are all highly trained and skilled in removing the birds safely and quickly, and most importantly, without injury to the birds. If you stay on the main path you will not come across nets, but if you see birds in the nets **DO NOT** try to remove them and don't stand by the nets. The ringers will be around very soon to remove the bird. Under normal circumstances the ringers are very happy to show you birds in the hand and explain the work they are doing. Due to the current restrictions they clearly cannot do that safely, and therefore at this time it is not possible to see ringing in action. We apologise for this and when normality returns we will be happy to organise a ringing demonstration should there be the demand.

Thanks to Woolston Eyes Conservation Group for its continued support of the work we are doing, and thanks to you, the permit holders, for sticking to the main paths and hides.

Kieran Foster - on behalf of the ringing team

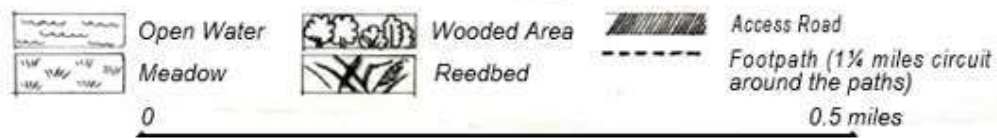
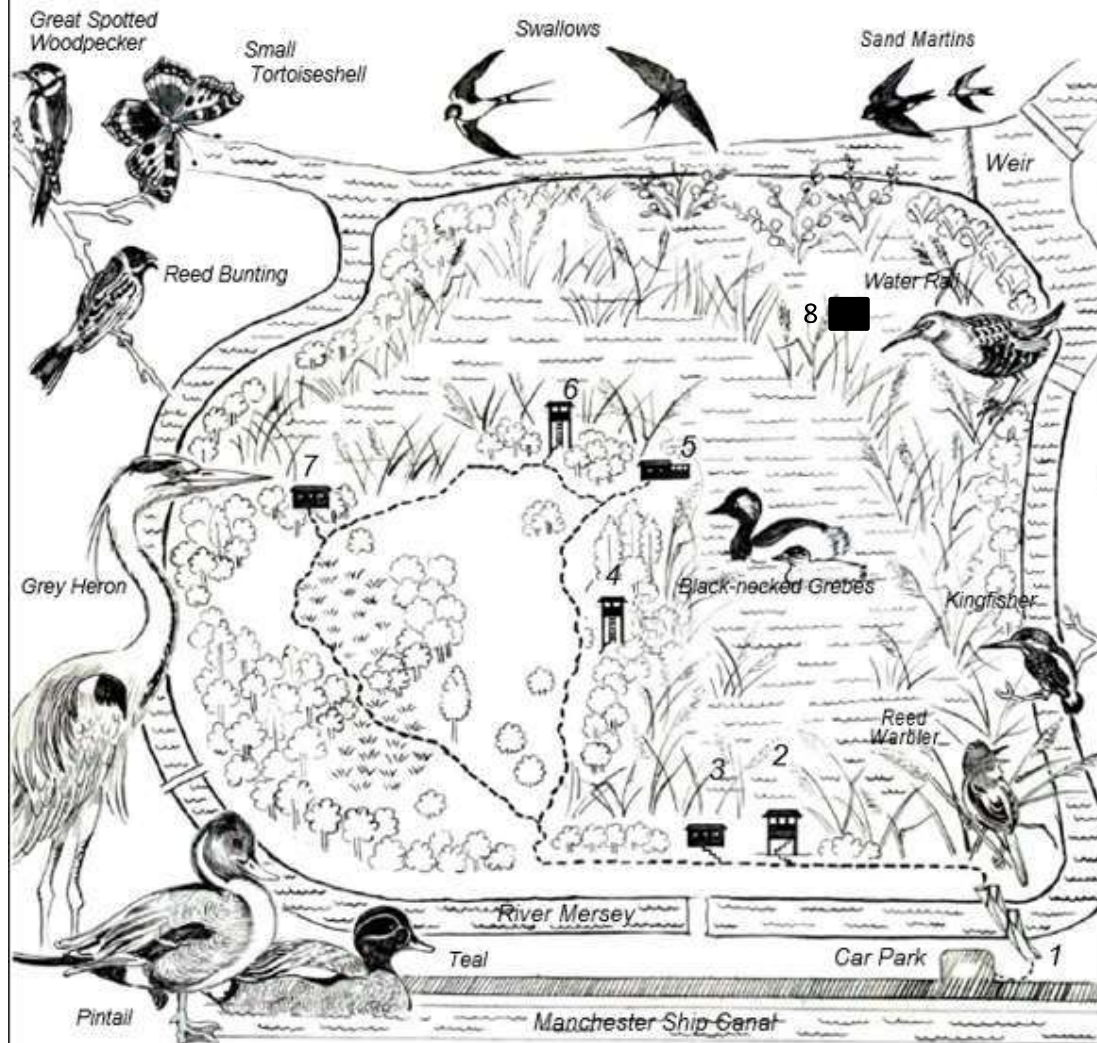
Unwelcome visitors

Over the years there have been people intent on exploiting the Reserve for illegal activities, including off-road motorcycling and shooting. In the last year or so several men with large dogs have come to the Eyes from outside the local area, usually parking in Weir Lane, Woolston. It is believed that they may be badger baiters, and we have been able to provide some information about them to the Police. If you see any one acting suspiciously please let me know as soon as possible. Do not place yourself in any danger. A car registration or description of the men would be very helpful.

Enjoy your birdwatching at Woolston!

Brian Martin, Recorder WECG

Plan of Number 3 Bed



- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Locked Gate on footbridge | 5 John Morgan Hide |
| 2 South Hide | 6 Frank Linley Hide |
| 3 Sybil Hogg Hide | 7 Warrington Rotary Hide |
| 4 Tower Hide | 8 Monitoring Hide
(wardens only) |

Illustration by Trisha Thompson

