

Woolston Eyes Newsletter Winter 2015

Nature Reserve of the Year 2015 Award

The year opened with the gratifying news that Woolston Eyes had been nominated in the Countryfile Magazine Nature Reserve of the Year Award 2015.



Woolston Eyes
nominated for
Best Nature Reserve award 2015

The four other Reserves nominated, each owned and backed by national or county organisations where;

WWT Wetland Centre, London

Martin Down NNR, Wiltshire

RSPB Minsmere, Suffolk

Bass Rock (The Scottish Seabird Centre), North Berwick

A very elite group of renowned locations so, how did we get on? Bass Rock was announced the winner followed by RSPB Minsmere and WWT London Wetland Centre. Woolston Eyes was Joint 3rd Runner Up is how I tell it to friends and family.

We are very proud to have been nominated and our Chairman Brian Ankers and the rest of WECG would like to thank everyone who voted for us, those who contribute in the management and running of the Reserve, our permit holders for their support and all our visitors who have spread the word and collectively make Woolston Eyes what it is today... an absolute jewel of a Reserve.

Aliens on the Reserve

The latest alien, non-native invasive species, to be found on the Reserve goes by the scientific name, *Azolla filiculoides*, common name, Water Fern.

Small pockets of this water plant, forming floating mats, have been noted in isolated parts of the Reserve early in the year. Susceptible to prolonged cold, it was noted colony sizes reduced with the onset of colder weather but it is highly probable some plants survived to regenerate in the spring and summer.



Azolla filiculoides habitas.org.uk

We have instigated action to remove and bury some of the accessible colony sites we have identified but *Azolla* is a vigorous plant and could spread further if it is evident in the many isolated ponds and drainage ditches around the Reserve. Monitoring will be conducted through the spring and summer to

identify the spread if any of this invasive species.

For further information on this plant species visit the NNSS (Non-native Species Secretariat) website at www.nonnativespecies.org or download the NNSS factsheet here; <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/downloadFactsheet.cfm?speciesId=451>

New Hide on the Loop of No.4 Bed

The regeneration work on the Loop of No.4 Bed, conducted during the winter of 2013, has been improved with the installation of a new elevated viewing hide for permit holder's use.



New Loop Hide photo by Dave Bowman

The hide, of steel construction will be locked, to deter vandalism, with your Reserve key providing access. The surrounding groundwork is still soft and the path to the hide from the main track will be consolidated when the area has dried and settled.

Starlings by the thousands!

Many of you managed to get down to No.3 Bed to watch the Starlings gathering to roost at dusk or stream from the reed beds in a 'river of birds' with the dawn.

Numbers reported peaked at around 400,000 individual birds with impressive murmurations – flock aerobatics – as the birds gather and built in numbers before the roost.



Starling murmuration photo by Dave Bowman

This number of birds could not fail to attract predators with Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Barn Owl and Marsh Harrier frequently seen.

Click the link below to view Brian Baird's video of show;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhwH3ThnYLOO>

Check out the spectacle of the Starlings leaving the roost with Dave Bowman's video in the Marsh Harrier note on page 3.

Otters

Yes, Otters! This attractive creature was recorded back in September 2014 on the waterway below the footbridge entrance to No.3 Bed by Brian Gort who managed to observe and capture record shots of a single Otter in what was a brief encounter



Otter photo by Brian Gort

Black-necked Grebes

First record back to the Reserve this year was two birds on the morning of 9th March.



Black-necked Grebe N0.3 Bed photo by David Spencer

Marsh Harrier

Two birds stayed around the Reserve for quite a number of weeks in the early months of 2014. We have seen a repeat stay by a single female bird this year.



Marsh Harrier No.3 Bed photo by David Spencer

To view Dave Bowman's video of the Starlings leaving the roost and the Marsh Harrier quartering the reeds click on the link;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqEJij_1uTk

Badgers

It would appear the best spot for Badger sightings is from the John Morgan Hide on No.3 Bed were they have been seen foraging around the bird feeders.



Badger, No.3 Bed photo by Dave Bowman

River Mersey

News regarding the improving water quality of the river was received from the environmental agencies report that 37 Atlantic Salmon and 6 Sea Trout had been recorded using the fish ladder at the Weir Basin in the 2014 season.

Spring is in the air

The 17th March sent us all a clear message that spring was around the corner with a trio of reports and sightings of interest;

Mediterranean Gulls - Two birds were reported on the afternoon of 17th but were seen to fly off eastwards the next morning



Mediterranean Gull No.3 Bed photo by Andy Weir

Probably the same birds returned and have provided many visitors with close views.

Both birds were still present at the time of printing on 25th March.

Cetti's Warbler - More commonly recorded during the autumn passage but on the 17th March a returning Cetti's Warbler was heard singing close to the John Morgan hide



Cetti's Warbler No.3 Bed photo from 2014 by Dave Bowman

And after a couple of year's absence from the records a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was also seen on the 17th along the south bank of No.3 Bed.

Trespass by Motor Bikers

Over recent weeks we have had issues with bikers speeding on the Canal track and even scrambling on the Reserve grounds, No.4 and No.1 Beds.

The weekends in particular has seen a number of incursions from both the western and eastern extremes of the Reserve. Biffa has been helpful in investigating and repairing some areas of disrepair but evidence shows bikers were again recently trespassing on No.1 Bed.

The police are aware of this trespass but need to catch the culprits in action to be effective. We strongly advise you not to approach these people but, to contact the police on the following telephone numbers;

101 or **01925 652222** or **01606 362630** if you witness any trespass.

Annual Reports

We are looking at the potential of making the annual report available electronically this year. Permit renewal communications provided you the option to purchase either form if you requested a report. We look forward to the publication later in the year.

Visiting Groups information

The following groups have booked visits to the Reserve during spring;

Sunday 22nd March, Knutsford Ornithological Society

Sunday 12th April, Leigh Ornithological Society, time to be confirmed but estimated 10.00am.

Tuesday 21st April, Cheadle U3A Staffs at 10:00am.

Monday 27th April: Monday Birders Club, 1.30pm.

Tuesday 28th April: Douglas Buchanan and friends, arriving at 10.00am.

Saturday 16th May, Chorley Natural History Society probably in the morning but we are waiting confirmation.

Wednesday 20th May, Warrington RSPB at 7:00pm.

Wednesday 27th May, Sandbach U3A Group at 9:15am

Wednesday 27th May, Halton & Warrington branch of Cheshire Wildlife Trust at 7:00pm.

Saturday 30th May, Rochdale Field Naturalists at 11:00am.

Monday 1st June, Oldham & Saddleworth U3A in the morning

Weather Forecast

The long range forecast for spring courtesy of netweather;

After a mixed bag of a winter, the sunniest on record with all three months milder than average but February only marginally so, spring is predicted to follow in similar style with a cold start followed by a milder spell, but will it continue in this vein?

April

No particularly strong signals exist for April, but with pressure shown to be slightly above average for the UK (with a stronger signal for above average pressure over Europe), a close to, or slightly drier than average month is currently forecast for our region.

Temperatures are forecast to widely be close to, or a little milder than average.

May

Into May and the forecasting model currently suggests that pressure will be slightly below normal which means a wetter than average month coupled with average temperatures.



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