

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR NEWT AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022

The year began with the second lockdown period of the pandemic. On a day which was only just above freezing, we were able to hold a workday on 2<sup>nd</sup> January when tasks left over from the previous year were tackled as best as possible. February and March workdays were cancelled in line with government advice on meeting.

In March it was first noticed that Kestrels were on the reserve and engaging in courtship display which gave rise to hopes that they might pair up and nest locally.

Workdays resumed on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and despite the late start, the large area of sedges to the right of the boardwalk was cleared during this and the next session in May. It was not possible to burn the cut material as usual, so it was left to rot down in one huge pile at the back.

In late April came the news we had been waiting for – that Barn Owls had been seen using the nest box by the carr, which was put up in December 2017 and Kestrels were using the one installed only the previous autumn.

A Bio-Blitz event – a joint venture between Avon Wildlife Trust and the Bristol & Avon Rivers Trust (BART) was held on the reserve on 9<sup>th</sup> May. The purpose was to use the reserve as a base for people to pick up test kits and use them to monitor the water quality along the course of the river Land Yeo. We provided a gazebo as a work station. This ‘Citizen Science’ project aimed at gathering information which will be used to identify problem areas and try to engage with farmers and landowners to improve the situation. BART were extremely grateful for our support and the event may be repeated in years to come to test the data again.



The orchids performed well and a count of 116 Southern Marsh (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) or Common Spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) orchids was taken on 12<sup>th</sup> June. The Southern Marsh orchid is the more dominant. The wetter conditions of the spring must have been more favourable than last year's extremely dry one.

A new interpretation board was installed in June by the dipping platform, showing all the creatures which visitors might encounter in and around the pond. The other two interpretation boards were replaced with an aluminium surface which will be much more long lasting.

The cold, wet spring was not helpful to Barn Owls, but the birds pulled through and raised 3 chicks each. The Barn Owl chicks were ringed by Chris Sperring from the Hawk & Owl Trust on 5<sup>th</sup> July, and the Kestrel box was checked, but the birds were not ringed.

The 3 Kestrels fledged at the end of June and the 3 Barn Owls a few weeks later between 23-27 July. This is testament to the ability of our reserve to provide enough food in the way of field voles to support this number of chicks, although the adults do hunt over a wider area.

Many visits were made in the evenings to watch the adults bring food to the youngsters and they all stayed around for a few weeks after fledging for support from the parent birds, the owls returning to the box to wait for food!

During July reports were received of Otters seen in daylight along the Land Yeo and Kingfisher, sometimes two, being seen as well. These are lucky sightings for people who regularly walk the area

During the summer months the removal of pond weed and scything of long grass and boardwalk clearance were on-going tasks.

We were delighted to receive news that we had been awarded a grant from the Quartet Community Foundation to install a boardwalk in the meadow and to improve the footpath between the carr and the gate to the meadow. Our footpaths have received very heavy wear during the pandemic with the increased number of visitors using the reserve.



The willow tunnel has been very quick growing and was eventually completed in August. It will need regular



maintenance. The remainder of last year's grant from National Grid was used to purchase another bench seat for the meadow. This was installed by our wonderful volunteers on an extra work session on 14<sup>th</sup> August.

We also received a grant from the Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) from their anniversary fund of £150 to purchase a replacement nest box for either owls or kestrels at the far end of the meadow. This was installed during workdays in October.

The September issue of the 'Nailsea Living' magazine featured the reserve's breeding success with Barn Owls and Kestrels.

August was a largely cool and cloudy month, but September was unusually warm and this extended into October which allowed a window of opportunity to get the grass cut on 1<sup>st</sup> October. Sheep grazing had been delayed by National Grid works and was no longer feasible. We were very fortunate that the AWT volunteers were available to do the raking up which is a very time-consuming process. It was not possible to remove the grass, which was left to rot down along the embankment. 14 volunteers carried out the work over two sessions on 6<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> October.

The owl boxes were cleaned out during November and new bedding added in the hope that the birds might roost in them over winter. The new plastic grids were installed in the carr passageway – a job which went much better than expected and has provided a much safer access for us as volunteers working on-site and for the visitors to have access to the meadow.

The one Ash Tree on the reserve (by the gabion bench) succumbed to Chalara 'Ash Dieback' disease and as it posed a risk to the public, was felled by local tree surgeon Tom Wooldridge in early December. Our December workday saw a record number of volunteers – 18. They all enjoyed the annual scything and raking of the sedges with bonfire and mince pies to make us feel festive.

Despite the restrictions of the early part of the year, we finished up with all the essential tasks completed and just the new boardwalk in the meadow outstanding.

During the year we have welcomed 5 new volunteers to the group. We would like to record our huge gratitude to all our volunteers for their hard work and dedication, for turning up every month and just getting on with the tasks which are not always pleasant!

