

ANNUAL REPORT FOR NEWT AGM 2020

The winter period was excessively wet for the second year running, but the annual sedge cutting was accomplished during the latter part of 2019 and February 2020.

The projects which we had planned to fund with our National Grid money started with tree planting by 3 of the trustees in January – some 20 Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*) saplings were planted around the whole site. The Black Poplar is a national rarity and grows well in boggy conditions.

On 21st March 3 trustees planted a Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) which was a donation from a local resident. This tree also does well in wet conditions and naturalises quickly. The COVID 19 pandemic was declared in March and by 23rd the country was placed in complete lock down. Despite the restrictions, work carried on throughout April with a small group of 4 volunteers to plant and water 250 wild flower plug plants which had been ordered from AWT. Roughly 50 each of Ox-eye Daisy, Knapweed, Yarrow, Wild Clary and Water Figwort were planted in a prepared area under the Land Yeo embankment where the ground is less saturated.

During April and May the weather was unseasonably warm and dry, and led to a steady stream of new visitors to the Reserve looking for local walks. This was a very opportune time to install our new interpretation boards (designed by the trustees in 2019) – one by the boardwalk and the other by the entrance to the meadow, helping visitors to understand what the reserve has to offer. Many visitors said that although the Reserve is on their doorsteps, they had never known of its existence beforehand. Response was very encouraging and gave us a much-needed boost in terms of local awareness. The rise in visitor numbers also brought some interesting reports of the wildlife they were spotting on their walks. The ponds were very popular with families and many enjoyed “dipping” with nets and buckets from the platform.

The dry conditions made it very difficult for the plants, new and established, to thrive and the Orchids made a very poor showing this year. The annual plant survey was not carried out in June due to exceptional heat.

In July a small bridge was constructed by Ian over the wet part of the carr passageway to duct the flow of water underneath it and improve the safety of the pathway. The steady increase in visitor numbers continued, with many exploring the meadow for the first time.

The July edition of the “Nailsea Living” magazine featured Moorend Spout as an “Oasis of Calm” offering the local residents a place to feel supported through these challenging times.

The fine summer weather in late July and August meant that butterflies were abundant, particularly the *Gatekeepers* and *Meadow Browns*. The *Small Tortoiseshell* was more numerous than in recent years, sparking hopes of a recovery for this once very common butterfly. The meadow did not produce a great variety of wild flowers, but the Birds’foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) was outstanding, forming huge splashes of yellow in many areas.

Workdays were able to resume in August, as long as “social distancing” was observed!

A donation of £250 from Nailsea Lions and £100 from Daphne Trott enabled us to install a bench seat near to the top pond. This work was achieved in sweltering heat but the end result was very satisfactory. A plaque was later added as a tribute to Terry Smith whose vision inspired the creation of the reserve.



During September, two of our bigger projects went ahead. After coming to the conclusion that drainage of the blocked Jacklands Tunnel was not going to be



achieved within our budget, the old ironwork cover was removed and contractors were brought in to fence the area off to the public and let a natural pond form. Shortly afterwards, the installation of our second Barn Owl nesting box took place. It was not easy to get this large object on site and erected, but a huge team effort saw it slot into place without a hitch.

Through September and October extra workdays were undertaken to attempt to scythe the meadow ourselves, rather than bring in contractors or

grazing animals. It was not possible to scythe more than the most species rich part of the grasses as it is very labour intensive and produces a lot of material which has to be removed by hand. During the process it was with much excitement that the nest of a *Harvest Mouse* was revealed. Attempts will be made next year to provide suitable nesting habitat to encourage them.



With a view to encouraging Barn Owls to nest in our first box, some old Barn Owl pellets (remains of prey items) were placed inside the box (on expert advice). We await results next year!

In early October we experienced some of the wettest weather on record and this meant the cancellation of our workday, which is almost without precedent (only heavy snow in March 2018 stopped us). Despite this and after being badly delayed by the pandemic, North Somerset Council Rights of Way team completely re-instated the bridge over the Spout and also provided a firm foundation between the gate and the riverbank, making it much easier for us and the public to access the site, for which we are extremely grateful to them. A leaflet dispenser placed on the bridge which outlines some history of the reserve and what has been achieved, has had to be constantly re-filled – which must indicate a big increase in new visitors to the reserve.



Government restrictions once again put an end to further volunteer working during November and December. Regrettably, we missed our annual bonfire and mince pies!

Considering the disruption to normal activities over the year, it is very satisfying that all our projects have been achieved and the Trustees would like to record their gratitude to all our loyal volunteers who turn up time after time and willingly tackle all manner of jobs. None of our projects could have been achieved without their hard work and cheerful support.



Scything team 31st October 2020