



Gatley Carrs Conservation Group Notes from the Ordinary Quarterly Meeting held at the Elm Road United Reformed Church, Gatley on 15th June 2022

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME (Peter Owen)

Welcome; It's nice to see you all again in the flesh and thanks for turning out on such a lovely evening. As we have a lot to get through we'll move straight on to the formal reports and I'll add my comments and highlight other matters under Any Other Business.

2. ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

Attendees: Margaret Brennan, Emma Burrows, Alan Butler, Andy Day, Janet Evans, John Haigh, Keith Holloway, Michelle Inwood, Lesley Larkin, Chris Mullin, Chris Neild, Peter Owen, Stuart Priestley, Jacob Sharp, Jean Skitt, Bettina Taylor,

Apologies: Angela Bent, Keith Marsden, Alan Musgrave, John Pollard

3. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Approved

4. MATTERS ARISING

No matters were raised.

5. TREASURERS REPORT (Michelle Inwood)

- Balance as at **7 March 2022** **£4858.42***
- Balance as at **3 June 2022** **£5032.93**

*Note: This figure is taken from the Treasurer's end of year report for the Annual General Meeting, March 2022

Incomings	£
• Memberships/donations	207.50
Total income	207.50
Outgoings	£
• Bird food (Shentons)	21.50
• Repair work	11.49
Total outgoings	32.99

Summary: Memberships and donations are gratefully received and make a huge difference to the upkeep of The Carrs. Thank you for your support!

As we currently have no other sources of income, we rely on the public for donations and for membership. If you would like to set up an online automatic payment, regular or one-off, the account details are as follows:

- Gatley Carrs Conservation Group
- Sort code: 01-01-75
- Account no: 19082894

6. SECRETARYS/MEMBERSHIP REPORT (Lesley Larkin)

I am happy to report some good progress since the last meeting in relation to the membership records. I now have access to see the group's bank statements and I've been able to do a thorough audit of payments received over the last 2 years. This has allowed me to be more accurate on some assumptions we'd made and as such, it means I'm much more confident on the numbers of members and the status of their subscription renewals.

To summarise, as of today we have 111 validated memberships (81 Family and 30 Single subscriptions), most of which (91) are paid via standing order. 12 of these are due for renewal or currently overdue so I'll be focussing on these in the coming month to hopefully encourage their continued support. In addition we have another 51 memberships that we are aware of but for which there is no record from the bank statements of their subscriptions being paid in the last 2 years. The good news though is we have email addresses for 49 of these so the intention is that I will send them a targeted polite email encouraging them to continue their support of the group if they can. We have succeeded in resolving the incorrect email addresses we had for 2 of our members but we still have 21 members for which we don't have any email or postal addresses. This means we can't share any of our reports or notices with them which is a shame. I'll keep talking to people until hopefully we can track these down. So, still a work in progress but I reckon light is appearing at the end of the tunnel.

Another item to note is the need to make a minor wording change to the recently approved constitution of the group. In setting up a Paypal account for the group, Michelle identified that it is necessary to be clear on our status and as such Item 9 of the constitution (Subscriptions and Expenditure) needs to be amended to include the line "The Group operates as a not for profit organisation." This change was approved by those attending this meeting.

ACTION:

- Lesley to update the constitution accordingly and re-issue

7. BIRD REPORT (Chris Neild)

The weather in April was quite pleasant until months end. Heavy rain and strong winds persisted for a few days. Certainly April showers at their best.

Spring was certainly on its way as many birds were in full song including Robin, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Wren and Dunnock. Two pairs of Song Thrush were seen carrying nest material. Several Blackbird, House Sparrow, Magpie, Woodpigeon and Collared Dove were also seen flying over with beaks full. Around the Reserve, Great and Blue Tit could be seen around many of the nest boxes. The 2 Nuthatch that I saw last month were also busy on their territories. The first returning Blackcap was heard first week in April and by months end, this had increased to 6. Only 4 Chiffchaff singing so far this month which is well down on last year's count of 10. Of course, it is possible that not all those birds stayed on to breed. If they are not successful finding a mate they will move on to another area.

On the Pond 17 Canada Geese, 6 Moorhen and 3 Domestic Ducks and at least 4 Ring-neck Parakeet were close by.

2 Buzzard were seen on several dates and a Sparrowhawk too. Excellent news was the sighting of a Kestrel seen by Chris Mullin. When I first started doing these reports I often saw them on the telegraph poles and wires along the motorway. The trees have grown so high it would not be possible to see them now if they were there.

4 Stock Dove were in the trees along the Top Field. Stock Doves have a "prettier" look, and are very different to the larger, gregarious, Woodpigeon that frequent many of our gardens.



Dove

Stock



Wood pigeon

It is quite special to see them at Gatley Carrs. Usually they are found in farmland and rural areas. They nest in holes in old trees and will use old farm buildings too. I am often asked "why do we never see baby pigeons"? The reason for this is they do not leave their nest sites until they are fully feathered and are able to fly and feed themselves. Nature is certainly amazing and it is free for us all to enjoy.

8. WILDLIFE AND NATURE REPORT (John Pollard)

As I write this report in early June, it is heartening to see the wildlife of the Carrs entering its summer glory despite a dry April.

Displays of Celandine, Garlic, Bluebells and Kingcups have given way to Cow Parsley and Ground Elder to replace them. Along the stream path were Three -Cornered Leeks with Wood Anemones and by the dipping pond, now with the white flowers of Barbery (Burberis) in the hedge. White May (Hawthorn), Guelder Rose and Elder flowers adorn the shrubs. Blossom on the orchard trees promises fruit, green Cherries and small Pears, Plums and Apples are forming.



Elderberry

On the pond are 7 Canada goslings, families of 4 and 3, 6 Moorhen chicks with one Moorhen still sitting on the nest on the dipping pond. Stickleback fry have been seen on the pond margins where yellow Flag Iris are abundant, sometimes hiding the feeding Heron.



Stickleback fry

Thanks to the efforts of members, the wildflower meadow is back to life with Cuckoo Flowers, Ox-eye Daisies, Buttercups, flowers of Yellow Rattle and Birdsfoot Trefoil. Even a few purple Marsh Orchids have re-appeared this month. Overall hopefully this is a promise of the full glory of summer flowers and a profusion of butterflies and colourful insects to come.

9. SITE MAINTENANCE REPORT (Alan Butler)

Summer is almost with us again and as I walk round the Carrs Reserve I 'm always pleased to see the fruits of our labour flourish again. This truly is an amazing place right on Gatley village doorstep.

On Sunday 21st March we had a task day on the Carrs, cleaning the steps by the bridge and some boardwalk repair, wood chip spread around muddy areas and the land drain cleared out by the Pickup Bench. Joe Huyton made a substantial repair to the boardwalk to stop it from moving around when walked on, even though this is not our responsibility, we do it as a gesture of goodwill and try and keep it accessible for all. On the 28th March Alan Musgrave kindly cut up logs blocking the stream flow with the help of Jim Arkwright, Keir Parsons and his son Jake removed the larger ones over to the bank. Now the water flows quite freely, a good job done! April 24th we called another Task Day and with volunteer help split the many "Blind" Daffodils from the edge of the top field transposing them to the Orchard area where we hope the damper and lighter ground will encourage them to flower again. We can only try but I think and hope this will work as these dwarf native bulbs were planted many years ago and just did not flower after the first season, let's hope we've brought them back to life. Also Peter led a working party to repair the bird hide that had been damaged by the strong winds. On May 21st Andy Day strimmed the area round the Snowdrop area removing unwanted Brambles with a view to encourage and increase these lovely spring delights. The next Task day is scheduled for the 25th and 26th June for the big Balsam Bash, I hope we get a good response from the volunteers as this is a really important task to keep this unwanted plant away from our reserve.

Thanks for your help over the past 3 months, kind regards to all, and the good news is I'm almost back to normal tasks again.

10. WILDFLOWER MEADOW REPORT (Chris Mullin)

The March report mentions that a number of snowdrops, wild daffodil and fritillary bulbs had been planted.

The wild daffodils started to flower on 4th March, accompanied by the snowdrops and tulips. The first Red Campion greeted the sunshine on 9th March.

On 21st March, 600 square metres were rotavated by Peter Owen, Stu (the mechanic) Priestly and me. Coltsfoot was underfoot, the Cowslips were returning in perfect health and the Speedwell was beginning to assert itself. No sign of the Yellow Rattle. As planned fresh wildflower seeds were sown into a gusty breeze on 22nd and 23rd March with a prayer. On 3rd April, Cowslips and two Snakes head fritillaries were enjoying the bright sunny weather, two wild tulip buds nodded in the 20kph wind. A strident Mistle Thrush fended off a villainous Magpie. White cloud scudded across the sky. By 12th April, 31 Snake's-head fritillaries occupied a small exclusive area near the interpretation panel. The following day 42 fritillaries were evident. Mostly purple, occasionally cream. I was spooked when I read that the fritillary is also known as the Leper's Bell! The maximum number of fritillaries counted was 47! On 22nd April, Lady's Smock was evident in several locations, but fewer than last year. However Goat's Beard (Jack-go to-bed-at-noon) was more numerous and I encouraged a couple of passers-by to be patient for a few days to witness the dandelion like, spherical seed 'clock', "...as elaborate as an astrolabe." Two Tree Creepers in hot pursuit of Spring shot past. Still no sign of the Yellow Rattle.

After visiting Derbyshire and noting that Yellow Rattle was everywhere, even between the cracks between the pavements, I began to adopt an idea I came across at Woodbank Nurseries, Offerton. That is, in the autumn, strip a ribbon of turf through the heavily grassed areas, add a quantity of limestone chippings, cover the limestone with the turf, seed with Yellow Rattle. Simple!

On a cold, damp 1st May, Meadowsweet leaves were evident in several locations across the meadow. A fox padded nonchalantly through the orchard. I could not help but notice an abundance of thistles. Were these green 'Donkey's Breakfasts' going to take over? Fortunately, thistles are easy to control:

1. Snip the plant off at the base. This will prevent the thistle from photosynthesising.
2. Grip the plant close to the ground and pull.

On 5th May an early Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) on the east side of the meadow. 7th May the first Corn Marigold, first Bird's Foot Trefoil and the inevitable Oil Seed Rape - a member of the turnip family with edible roots.

A goodly number of Thistle Hunters volunteered to help and over three days several hundred kilos of thistles were removed. Leaving a few aptly named, Melancholy Thistles. Thank you to all who helped.

May 23rd dawned warming several significant stands of Yellow Rattle.

Seven Early Marsh Orchids stood stock still on the undisturbed ground in the western corner of the meadow. The vernacular name for this plant is, 'Adder's Meat' because the colouring of the splotched leaves bears some resemblance to a coiled adder.

To subdue the grasses and encourage the growth of additional wildflower species at the southern end of the meadow, using the scythe, we have started to create a type of patchwork in the hope that once the grasses are subdued wildflowers will move in. The 'patchwork system' will reduce nutrients and depress the excess energy of the plants. Furthermore, the shorter grass makes it easier for the birds to forage. Patchworking has, to an extent, proved effective. However it is early days.

In addition to Yellow Rattle and Corncockle there are other parasitic and semi parasitic plants that bear investigation for the future. For example, Red Bartsia, Common Cow Wheat, the Eyebrights Euphrasia. The Broomrapes Orobanche group includes a Thistle Broomrape which parasitizes thistles. Something for everyone. If you're interested to see pictures, the website <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/spotter-sheets> gives a month by month view of what you can spot.



Ragged Robin
Silene flos-cuculi
Once a common wild flower, it is now classed as near-threatened. It is particularly beloved by long-tongued bees.
Where to find it:
Wetter woods & meadows

STAR FIND



Agrimony
Agrimonia eupatoria
Also called 'church steeples' after its tall floral spikes. In Victorian times it symbolised "Thankfulness".
Where to find it:
Hedgebanks, roadsides



Bee Orchid
Ophrys apifera
In a clever ploy to attract pollinators, it not only looks like a bee, it also emits a female bee scent!
Where to find it:
Pastures, banks, chalk



Common Poppy
Papaver rhoeas
Poppy seeds only sprout when the earth around them is disturbed, hence why so many grew on the battlefields of WWI.
Where to find it:
Disturbed ground



Common Spotted-orchid
Dactylorhiza fuchsii
Our commonest orchid, as its name suggests. It can range in colour from deep lilac to light pink & even pure white.
Where to find it:
Alkaline grasslands



Dog-rose
Rosa canina
Syrup made from this wildflower's rosehips have twenty times as much Vitamin C as orange juice!
Where to find it:
Hedgerows



Foxglove
Digitalis purpurea
Its mottled markings were once thought to be the handprints of fairies. A single 'glove' can produce a million seeds.
Where to find it:
Woods and banks



Oxeye Daisy
Leucanthemum vulgare
Often in bloom around the summer solstice. If cattle eat it, it can affect the flavour of their milk.
Where to find it:
Grassy verges



Yellow Iris
Iris pseudacorus
Also known as 'Yellow Flag', it grows where water runs shallow - hence it can indicate the presence of a ford.
Where to find it:
Damp soil, water margins



Yellow Rattle
Rhinanthus minor
Great for wildflower meadows as it restricts the growth of grasses by feeding off their nutrients.
Where to find it:
Grassy banks

Help us bring colour to the countryside. Join today: www.plantlife.org.uk/membership

11. SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT

It has been very quiet this quarter although we are now well over the 1000 members following our Facebook page. There have been lots of posts and photos over the spring months with the arrival of the goslings and the beauty of the season. The page works well too to muster up volunteers for various task days and it's always nice to see the photos of the work carried out and its benefits to the reserve.

The PayPal option has very recently been added to our website which will make making payments and tracking them an awful lot easier. We will be starting our 1000x1000 initiative now the PayPal is up and running - the idea of a thousand pounds to be raised via PayPal using the 1000 people on our page to make the £1 donation. The amount raised will go towards the disabled pathway which we are really keen to push forward with but the costs are eye watering!

STANDING INFORMATION:

Volunteer work; We now have a **WhatsApp** group set up for contacting volunteers and advising when and what tasks need doing. This is now working very well. If you would like to be added to this group please let me know, message me on **07799 888049** and I will add you into the group. Any time you can spare all helps us enormously.

Fund raising, Our ongoing need; We are very grateful to the numerous people who have made donations during the year as they remain vital to our survival. **If anyone is experienced in sourcing funds and support grants we really could do with your help to assist us in any way you can. Support from SMBC has increased recently but their funds are severely stretched at the best of times and even worse now due to Covid, so other sources are needed. Please contact us if you can help.**

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- a. Gatley Festival: We have a stall for the day on July 3rd. Stall opens at 12 with the parade arriving about 12:30. Volunteers are needed to man the stall, hand out leaflets encouraging people to join and to run the Splat the Rat activity.
- b. Fields In Trust: With the change in leadership at Stockport MBC Peter Owen has contacted our Lib Dem councillors to get this back on the agenda and in motion again. Jacob Sharp, from Mary Robinson's office, read out a letter of support from Mary. Equally Keith Holloway offered his support and agreed to follow this up.
- c. Peter Owen held a site meeting with Anthony Crooke (Stockport Arboriculture and Habitat Officer) on 28th April and discussed all issues of concern:
 - i. Fence repair is now complete
 - ii. Confirmation of land ownership of the Lorna Grove part of the site is still in progress with Anthony in contact with the relevant party in Manchester.
 - iii. The condition of the car park is concerning and funding is required to ease the problem. Anthony has raised a request with the council infrastructure budget holder. A decision on what can be done, ie either a long term or short term fix, is awaited.
 - iv. Environment Agency stream diversion: We still do not know what the EA plans and timescales are which means we cannot move ahead with any plans to improve the path for disabled and buggy access. Anthony will chase up with the Environment Agency but if answers are not forthcoming additional help to find the right contacts will be needed.
- d. It is recognised that new noticeboards are needed for the wildflower meadow and main pond access. A large welcome sign for the car park and new Perspex screens for the car park and field noticeboards are also required.
- e. The Green Flag inspection took place with a site visit on 4th May. The result is awaited.
- f. Grants: Applying for grants is currently tricky given we do not know how our main path will be affected by the Environment Agency stream diversion plans but Peter Owen is pursuing potential grant sources such as United Utilities/Network Rail/National Grid/Suez waste services and others to understand what their application processes are.

Many thanks for your continued support. We'd appreciate it if you could take any opportunity to spread the word about the Gatley Carrs Conservation Group.

Peter, Chairman
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Next Meeting

Proposed date of next meeting which will be the Annual General Meeting is **September 14th 2022 7.30pm.**