

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 13TH NEWT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The year started, as previous years, with prolonged heavy rain and flooding on the reserve. Despite the weather, most of the annual scything and burning of the sedge area was completed in January.

February turned out to be the driest month on record, which allowed work to continue on installing the grid pathway from the end of the boardwalk and up the embankment steps. An extra workday was included to complete the task.

100 Dogwood (*Cornus sanguineum*) saplings were planted at the top of the reserve in the area behind the pond with the intention of absorbing some of the excess water in the area.

Poor weather again in March meant that the annual scything of the sedge was not completed until April.

First recording of the **Cetti's Warbler** (*Cettia cetti*) singing from the carr area. A once rare migrant bird, now thought to be extending its range from the South East of the country. It was still present in September, with hopes of breeding success. **Whitethroats** (*Sylvia communis*) were late returning, not being recorded until end of April.

In early May we hosted a visit from the 2nd Nailsea Scouts (5-11 years) who enjoyed a pond dipping session. A second group of older Scouts came a week later and did sterling work removing a large amount of the invasive wild turnip from the embankment, saving our volunteers a lot of work.

Sadly, Newt's founder trustee Terry Smith passed away at the family home in Kent in early May. A memorial service for him was subsequently held in Nailsea at the end of October and a plaque has been placed on his bench by the top pond on the reserve.

On 22nd May we hosted a visit from the 1st Backwell Beavers (6-8 years) who enjoyed a pond dipping session.

By the end of May we had counted in the region of 120 Orchid plants across a large part of the reserve.

June was extremely hot and dry but our experimental wild flower patch produced a glorious assortment of pollinator plants with **Ox-Eye Daisy** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and **Yellow Rattle** (*Rhinanthus minor*) doing particularly well.

The **Scarce Chaser** Dragonfly (*Libellula fulva*) turned up on 10th June and stayed around for a few weeks. An uncommon and threatened species.

Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) were heard for the first time on the reserve at the far end of the meadow and again later in the year, so may have been able to breed.

July was cool and quite wet, despite being recorded as (globally) the hottest year on record. We were delighted to discover that our **Kestrel** box contained 4 healthy chicks when it was checked on 5th July by Trevor Riddle. They fledged sometime the following week, a little later than last year, as the birds would have started nesting later due to the cold Spring.

At the end of the month the Avon Wildlife Trust Reserves team and some staff members came with brushcutters and other equipment to help us tackle the huge amount of grass needing cutting in the meadow. The Gordano volunteer group came a few days later to do the raking up, but poor weather prevented completion of the task.

By August work days were taken up with keeping the paths around the reserve cut back and an extra workday was held to tackle the reeds at the far end of the meadow which were swamping the Dogwood saplings.

Our Dragonfly sculpture, which was commissioned from the Nailsea Sheddors and funded by Waitrose Community fund, was installed near to the meadow gate.

In September we again took part in the Bat Study, carried out this time by the University of Bath in conjunction with North Somerset Council. Recording equipment was installed on 22nd September in the carr area and despite some bad weather over the week, 12 different species of Bat were recorded, 2 of them new records for the reserve – the **Greater Horseshoe Bat** (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) and **Natterer's Bat** (*Myotis nattereri*) Both are quite rare and declining species. Our thanks are due to Melissa Vermaux for her time and expertise in carrying out the study.

October and November were unusually mild but wet and workdays had to be re-scheduled due to heavy rain. The long grass at the end of the boardwalk was cleared back, which had not been done in the last couple of years and the carr outflow was opened up after becoming covered in excessive vegetation.

December workday was carried out in sub-zero temperatures. Volunteers were kept warm by scything the sedges near the boardwalk but the bonfire did not burn well because of the very wet conditions. The overall conditions on the reserve are noticeably wetter, year on year, as rainfall increases. Drainage is a problem to be addressed as soon as possible next year, as is the condition of the boardwalk.

Overall, we have had a very successful year with the bonus of several new bird, mammal and insect records.

Species most regularly seen on the reserve include - Heron, Stonechat, Buzzard, Kestrel, Green Woodpecker and Pheasant. Amongst the butterflies, Red Admiral was around for the longest and Gatekeeper and Comma had a good year. Roe Deer are also frequently seen on or adjacent to the reserve.

Particular thanks are due to Viv French and her assistant Kate Sparey for diligently recording the birds and butterflies present on the reserve over the year.

There were 14 workdays held over the year, 7 of which had a turnout of 15 or more volunteers.

Total volunteer hours recorded are **757**, which is a bit down on last year (813) probably because there was no open day this year and some work days had to be cancelled due to the bad weather.

The trustees would like to record their gratitude to all our volunteers for their commitment and enthusiasm, without which none of our work would be possible.

Thanks also should be recorded to Rosemary for keeping an accurate record of our meetings and the accounts up to date.