



Volunteer Newsletter

Issue 6

Autumn / Winter 2021

We hope this newsletter will keep you up to date with what volunteers are up to throughout Manx Wildlife Trust. If you'd like to find out more about wider volunteering opportunities, please contact enquiries@mwt.im. You can also keep in touch with what is happening with MWT by looking at our new Website (mwt.im), our Facebook page, Twitter or Instagram.

Celebrating Our Volunteers

We were delighted to have six Volunteer Award recipients this year. Volunteers are nominated for outstanding work during the past year or for their continued invaluable contribution over a number of years. We held a presentation evening on Wednesday 10th November at Greens in St Johns for award winners (pictured alongside adult education course participants below) and recipients were presented with their awards by MWT Chair Viv Davies and CEO Leigh Morris.

The evening was very enjoyable and it was inspiring to hear what our volunteers have achieved for wildlife on the Island. It was also interesting to find out how much they value their volunteering time; whether it is spending time in nature, making a difference for wildlife, socialising with like-minded people or keeping active, there is something for everyone! For details of our award recipients, please look at the news article on our [website](http://mwt.im).



Midweek Muckers - Tricia Sayle

After the marathon hand cutting and clearing of many meadows last summer, there was a huge sigh of relief all round that all the hay-making was done on schedule in a

more conventional fashion this summer. This did still leave the usual areas of species-rich grassland to be done by hand, but this was a doddle after last year.

The generally good summer weather enabled us to get on with numerous jobs and the continued turnout of an excellent number of Muckers each week, has meant all is on schedule. We even got to a few jobs slightly earlier than usual! Our battle to remove Montbretia, a plant common in many gardens but highly invasive, has continued across several sites including Goshen, Close Umpson, Moaney and Crawlwyn's Meadows and Cronk y Bing.



The annual winter work of fenceline clearance and ditching has started in earnest across the meadow reserves, with any necessary fence repairs taking place as we go. Grazing will be taking place on most of these meadows through the winter months.



Coppicing of willow and hazel has resumed at Aust and some of this has already been used on a hedge laying



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project near Peel. Almost all the hazel coppiced earlier in the year regenerated extremely well. Unfortunately, our rustic fencing didn't stand up to curious sheep who developed quite a taste for it. Plan B required. Coppicing will resume at Close Sartfield early in 2022. It is hoped much of this will be used for stakes and binders in hedge laying but we will also be making wattle panels again and have birch brush available for horse jumps.

Northern Group

Ayres Nature Discovery Centre - Kim Etherton

The centre was put to good use this summer with 2 talks at the Ayres during Manx Wildlife Week, as well as two Watch group meetings and an adult education course being run there by Dawn.



We were very excited to be notified of road re-surfacing and now have a wonderful road but only up to the first car park. The rest of the road to the Centre is the responsibility of DEFA, not Dol - and the chances of work here are not looking too good.

The Centre closed as usual in mid-September but, despite the lack of visitors to the Island and then to us, we took £419.13 in shop sales and £308.04 in donations. The shop sales are virtually at pre-Covid levels which is amazing given that our visitor numbers were down on previous years at 960. Thank goodness for staycations! Also being able to use a card reader really did make a great deal of difference!

Looking forward there are plans to improve the interpretative facilities of the Centre and give it a facelift during 2022 - volunteer help may be needed so watch this space!

2021 Gardner's Fair - Ian Davies

Successful though the event was in June, we were still left with many plants. The 'growing together trio' (Jackie Kaye, Joe Cant and Ian Davies) hatched up the idea of a Pop Up Sale to put them to good use (and save on watering). So, there we were in a lovely position at the entrance to the Curraghs Wildlife Park - many thanks to Kim for arranging with Kathleen - on Sat/Sun 7th/8th August



with our 'two trailer pop up shop' Once again, blessed with very good weather, we had a great response both from those using the Park and direct public visits having seen the extensive social media announcements. Towards the end of Sunday afternoon, we still had lots of flowering plants, and used them as free gifts to children to pass on to their mums. This gave us a great introduction to dialogue about how great MWT membership is, especially for families. Many leaflets were taken away and we were confident quite a few were going to be converted into membership in the following weeks. Oh, and we raised another £909 to go with the £5,600 raised in June. Well worth the effort! As ever a team effort with help from Peter, Kim, Paul, and Viv to transport plants back and forth as well as providing cover to keep sales flowing and allow "respite" when needed.

Autumn Talks at Ramsey Town Hall - Viv Davies

Our programme of talks was shifted from the early part of the year due to Covid, but every cloud has a silver lining as the autumn turns out to be a much better time to draw people out and, for this series, engage them with nature! We have decided that an autumn programme will be arranged for 2022.

We started in September with Andree Dubbleadam giving an update on MWT's exciting Ramsey Forest project, then in October Leigh Morris outlined the importance of working with others to achieve the best for wildlife and finally in November Lara Howe with Aron Sapsford presented the characters of the Calf. The latter was I believe the first time we have had a live audience as well as one joining by Zoom and it was a huge success - sold out!



These talks are primarily to raise awareness and engage with our members as well as the public, but I am pleased to say they did cover costs with a small excess.

Again, huge thank you to all the volunteers and speakers as well as to Rachael Harrop and Graham Makepeace Warne for the great social media work and the "techy stuff" on the nights.



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Southern Group - Margaret Kelly

Southern Group are delighted that Sheila Norris and Ian Costain are to be given "Volunteer Awards."

Sheila's organising of volunteers' work parties and ever diligent recording of species at Ballachurry Nature Reserve are invaluable. Her planning and attention to detail prepares the way for effective use of labour when the volunteers are on site. Sheila has built up detailed records of Ballachurry flora and fauna and has been rewarded with many sightings of "firsts" for Ballachurry and, occasionally, for the Island.

Ian, ably assisted by Peter Hayhurst and others, has repaired and maintained the bird hide and is now replacing the boardwalk and bridge. These jobs take much time, know-how and effort. Ian also provides bins and a trailer so that bramble cuttings can be taken off to the tip after work parties and bulky items can be transported. For the past couple of summers Ian and his wife Carrie raised funds for MWT by having open days at their delightful garden.

There is a core of loyal volunteers without whose work Ballachurry could not be maintained and we are very grateful to them.

Scarlett Nature Discovery Centre



Thirteen volunteers worked the regular opening hours at Scarlett this summer. In addition two special sessions were organised by Southern Group. The first was a Fossil and Geology talk and walk lead by geologist, Dave Burnett. The second was a rock pooling event lead by Dawn Colley. Each event enjoyed a good turnout and lovely weather. Scarlett Volunteers provided refreshments.

During August Southern Group Volunteers redecorated the inside and outside of the Centre after new windows and doors had been installed.

Eight hundred and forty-four visited Scarlett Centre during the

Summer. These included those who came for special sessions with Dawn. In addition two groups of special needs Scouts visited with Guy and Janet Thompson. We are grateful to Guy for his support with events at Ballachurry, Scarlett and the venue for the Christmas wreath workshop.

Ballachurry Reserve - Sheila Norris

Work Parties resumed in August after a break over the summer to



allow ground nesting birds some peace and quiet. A full description of work undertaken at Ballachurry can be found in the [Ballachurry Blog](#), but work parties have involved a range of tasks, including cutting back vegetation; digging silt from ditches; stream; pond and reedbed maintenance; creating new boardwalks and removing old ones; and raking meadow cuttings.

On 22nd August the Southern Group Committee organised an Open Afternoon at the reserve. Various other wildlife organisations and individuals were present with information stalls and educational walks. This was well attended by the public and deemed a great success. It was made possible with help from volunteers putting up the tent and tables and generally setting up. Volunteers were present to help during the afternoon and dismantled and cleared up at the end of the day.

Marine

Seal Sitting - Clare Rogerson

Tuesday 16th September saw our final Seal-Sitter Training Session of 2021, with a record attendance of 34 willing helpers! Our Seal-Sitting volunteers provide a vital service,



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monitoring seals that have hauled-up on the Island's many stretches of shoreline and protecting them from accidental disturbance by other beach-users, particularly pedestrians and dogs who may not have spotted the furry



visitors sharing their coastal spaces.

Un-weaned pups, characterised by their bright-white, fluffy appearance, are still dependent upon their mother's milk and require feeding at regular intervals. Although a pup may appear to be alone, their mother is almost always close-by and will be waiting for a safe opportunity to return to her pup to allow them to suckle. The volunteers monitor the pup from a distance, put-up signs to indicate his or her location and advise the public of its presence to prevent the pup from being disturbed, injured or even rejected; an obviously crucial service.

Older, weaned pups have shed their snowy-white fur and have beautiful, velvety, spotted coats, perfectly evolved to help them camouflage with the muted tones of the sand and pebbles on the shore. Although they no longer have the care of their mother, a weaned pup on the shore is not usually in need of assistance. Mostly they are resting and digesting their last meal and will return to the sea once they are ready.

The volunteers were expertly informed of the duties and importance of their role by MWT's Marine Conservation Officer, Dr Lara Howe, who has several years' experience working with, and a genuine passion for, the seals here on the Isle of Man.

The invaluable contribution of the Seal-Sitting volunteers promotes the future success of the two seal species resident here on our Island, maintaining the ecosystem and marine biome to which they belong.

Marine Mammal Stranding - Lara Howe

We held another dead marine mammal strandings course on Tuesday 23rd November at the MWT office in Peel, with 10 enthusiastic volunteers joining the team. This role requires a strong stomach and a bad sense of smell! The programme is run on behalf of DEFA and feeds into national and international work. This work is particularly busy during the autumn and winter with the increased storminess and Grey Seal pups being born. The evening involved learning about the main species likely to wash up on our shores, such as harbour porpoise and grey seals, and how to record them. We were also joined by two important guests, Sammy the stuffed seal and an inflatable harbour porpoise (courtesy of MWDW) that modelled beautifully for us. They are great aids in showing how to take the various measurements needed to complete the forms. It is hoped that this work will help us gain a better understanding of our marine megafauna and identify any trends in the populations.

Festival of the Sea - Lara Howe

After a shaky start around the uncertainty of the event with covid, Festival of the Sea went ahead on the 24th and 25th July this year, as part of the wider Port Erin Sea and Beach Festival. We were pleased to be supported by OceanWeb this year and it enabled us to hold a corporate event on the Friday night, hosted by OceanWeb, who invited Isle of Man Maritime to join us. The evening started with a presentation by MWT's marine officer Lara Howe who talked about the marine work undertaken by MWT. Invited guests were later given a tour of the marine life in the tanks by our volunteers. It was a great success and one that will be repeated again next year again with the support from OceanWeb.



Even with our added security measures in place numbers over the weekend were down compared to previous years but this didn't deter us and in fact it meant the volunteers behind the tanks had more time to talk to people and explain the wonders that can be found in Manx waters. It made for a more engaging event and more enjoyable for

all. The other attractions in the marquee included the Seasearch maze, where children had to find all our marine creatures around the marquee to spell out a marine animal, and the members of the public, young and old, could get involved in painting a marine scene drawn by local artist Amanda Quellan who was on hand to help advise people and provide encouragement. Another successful year and we look forward to next year.



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Small Shark Tagging - Lara Howe

This year we ran another training course for anglers and organised 3 boat trips on Gemini. We wanted to try some new sites to see what was out there but sadly didn't tag as many sharks as we had hoped. Thankfully the anglers managed to tag independently and this year we tagged 52 sharks including Tope and Spurdog. We haven't had any recaptures this year but it shows there are large numbers in Manx waters. Hopefully we'll get a few recaptures in the future.

Both the shark tagging and Festival of the Sea were made possible with funding from DEFA. If you are interested in getting involved with the Festival of the Sea next year, or would like to get involved with seal sitting, marine mammal strandings or small shark tagging, please get in touch with Lara at lara@mwt.im.



Calf of Man - Aron Sapsford

A busy season was had on the Calf, with volunteers helping with a wide range of tasks. Ana, Sue, Luise, David and Brian helped with bird monitoring and ringing, spending between one and six weeks on the Calf. Di spent a couple of weeks helping with estate tasks and Christa (one of our Volunteer Award recipients spent time bait monitoring). David, Pat, Ned and Gillian all spent a week dry-stone walling at the



lighthouses and Lauren and Mairi were our seal volunteers monitoring seal pups, identifying mums and looking at site fidelity.

Citizen Science

Upland Peat Survey - Gill Lockett



For the last two years I have spent many a happy hour or day wandering over the hills in search of that elusive butterfly called peat and sometimes sphagnum moss. Those of you of a certain age will get the Val Doonican link. There is nothing more pleasurable than being in a remote area, blazing your own path and feeling the wind on your face as you go from waypoint to waypoint. Once there, you have the opportunity to stop and admire the view before thrusting your trusty measuring pole into the peat and pulling it out with force whilst holding to the marker you made indicating the point on the pole where it can go no further into the ground. This action does at times look more like a Laurel and Hardy comedy as the earth resists the pull but it's a great way to use up calories. Then you are left anxiously trying to find the faded marker on the pole to measure the distance peat goes into the ground. For anyone who would like to follow in my footsteps and become a Volunteer Peat Surveyor, you measure from the tip of the pole to the marker you have made. This is all considerably easier if there are two of you as one can hold the tape measure and the other the pole to take the reading. At each waypoint you take three readings and then begins the hunt for the sphagnum moss in that area. Once you know what you are looking for this is quite straightforward, but you will be surprised at the places it tries to hide. You think there is nothing there, then move some grass or heather and find it sheepishly looking at you trying not to be noticed. In other places the sphagnum moss is



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unmissable, most often on small plateaus and channels where the water consistently runs off the hills. I have been surveying South Barrule and now know almost every inch of it, every dry, wet, steep, shallow, rocky, mossy part of it, and I have become extremely fond of this hill and my time surveying it will stay a long time in my memory. You can find a more detailed description of a day on South Barrule on my blog here: <https://gillsisleofmanwalks.blog/2020/09/21/peat-survey-on-south-barrule-sept-2020/>

National Butterfly Recorder

We are currently looking for a volunteer for the role of Isle of Man National Butterfly Recorder. If you are interested in butterflies and would like to know more about this role there is more information on our [website](#).



Office

We rely on volunteers helping us with many tasks around the office, from looking after MWT membership to helping with various admin tasks, such as digitising documents and invoicing. This year we also had help with sorting through bat recordings.



Wildlife Gift Shop

Thank you to all of the volunteers who regularly help run our shop—you do an amazing job and we couldn't manage without you!

Events

3rd December: The Northern Group will be holding a Christmas raffle at Shoprite Little Switzerland .

4th December: [Kids Christmas Trail at Ballachurry](#). A small band of volunteers will be putting up a tent on for the Christmas Trail Event run by Dawn Colley. Some will be on site during the event and providing refreshments. Father Christmas has joined volunteers and will be leaving goodies in the hide for the children. He's unlikely to be seen as he's very busy at this time of year but his presence may be heard by his Ho -ho -ho-ing and the sound of jingle bells!

11th December: [Kids Christmas Trail at Close Sartfield](#). Dawn is also running a similar event in the north, at Close Sartfield.

11th December: [Traditional Wreath Making Workshop at Mullin y Carty](#).

This is a popular event run by the Southern Group volunteers, so book your place to avoid disappointment!

18th December: [Christmas Crafting at Milntown](#), with volunteer Jean Buck.

Jean is a local artist specialising in silk paintings, so if you fancy having a go, you can join Jean and our Education Officer Dawn for some mince pies and mulled wine.



Finally...

As always, thank you for your on-going support, the work of volunteers is crucial for MWT to operate at our best. With many exciting events coming up this summer, we hope to see you all there.

If you know of any volunteers who haven't received this newsletter, please could you ask them to get in touch so we can send them one?

Thanks!



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