

**URSWICK TARN ASSOCIATION  
MANAGEMENT –WILDLIFE REPORT- APRIL 05**

Previous reports have dealt with either management-at yearly intervals-or wildlife at 6 monthly intervals but as the two subjects are so closely intertwined it seems logical in future to combine the two into 6 monthly reports.

For the purposes of this report management refers to the period 20/04/04—00/04/05 while wildlife refers to the period Sept 04-April 05.

As usual the management work undertaken has consisted of ongoing projects and general maintenance such as path strimming and litter removal.

While litter is not a major problem in the area there is always something to be picked up for much of the year, many items in the reed beds-ditches only becoming visible once vegetation has died down.

While the regular work parties have not been as well attended as one would hope a considerable amount of time has been put into management since the autumn and in fact the total of hours worked has increased on the previous year to---- ----hrs or---- ----man days.

The most obvious project during the period has been the recently completed work on the South end of the Hag where after much clearance and many bonfires a large area of mostly dead-dying bramble and elder has been cut back-several sycamores felled and approx 100 metres of hedge laid, in the process a large area of snowdrops was uncovered which gave a good show in spring and the area is now greening up nicely.

On the roadside along the top edge of this area the rough banking has been levelled by Mr Waddington and his digger and we gather is already being utilised by passing walkers as a view point and sandwich stop.

On the top section of the Hag a large area-some-----sq m of bramble has been cut back and burnt- much remains.

On the tarn itself in an effort to encourage regrowth of reeds a fence has been erected along the outside edge of a large area which was a thick reed bed until a short time ago but is now open water.

Several gaps left in the fence to allow Coots-Mallard etc easier access have been partially closed off with branches to keep out the bigger geese and cormorants.

Live willow branches planted along the fence will make the fencing more visible to flying birds and avoid collisions but `soften` its appearance to the human eye.

Large willow branches thinned from the Croft area have been driven into deeper water off Postlethwaites meadow to form a base for another reef area-in addition the Postlethwaites have placed branches from recent hedge laying on the actual tarn edge to give extra protection-more branches will be added as and when they become available, similar work has recently been carried out on the South west edge of the tarn.

In the main reed bed regrowth on the felled willow stumps has been cut back and burnt, in addition two small ponds and a section of shallow ditch have been cleared of silt to maintain the areas diversity -spoil from this work has been used to fill up uneven areas along the catwalk bank.

In the boathouse area the previous years felling of willow trees to allow more light in has-as envisaged - encouraged the fen type vegetation but has also allowed alders to seed and grow where none did before so these too have been removed.

The larger alder which provided these seeds (the biggest of its kind in the area) has been partially pollarded over the years-its trunk riven into several sections by weather-age rot and insects.

The branches on these sections are now so big they sometimes creak in the wind and threaten to tear the tree apart which would be a pity, severely reducing the size of these branches will look drastic but help to ensure the trees survival in the long term.

In the Croft there are encouraging signs of reed growth in the area protected by the willow `reef` so the `reef` itself has been pushed out 2 metres to enlarge the protected area of shallows.

On the wildlife front the comments in the April-Sept report requesting information on the whereabouts of the tarns allegedly high Mink population drew no response- hopefully a sign of low mink numbers rather than observer apathy.

In any event with otters once more frequenting the area one would expect Mink numbers to mirror experience in other areas where-faced with a superior predator mink have drastically declined.

While things have been fairly quiet on the tarn wildlife front during the period the unmistakable `wheoo` calls of Wigeon were heard over the tarn late one afternoon-largely a salt marsh duck during the winter Wigeon are rarely seen here-always in ones and twos so to see 47 in one flock was unexpected to say the least.

Birds such as these-here today-gone to morrow (or sooner)could be said to be biologically irrelevant to the tarn in that they have minimal contact with or effect on it but they are no less interesting for that and some when they do appear are worth the wait.

With dusk falling on Oct 4<sup>th</sup> 2004 a loud cheeping whistle announced the presence of yet another long awaited visitor to the area.

The almost continuous rather pathetic cheeping belied the size of the bird which made it for perched in the top of a large dead elm tree on the edge of Hooks Lane was Pandion Haliaetus an Osprey.

After perching in the tree for some time it flew into the wind attempting to cross the Urswick crags ridge but failed and was swept back to where it started to soar at tree top height over the lane-an impressive sight.

After two more attempts to continue its southward journey what appeared by now to be a very tired Osprey changed `tack` and flying virtually at field level used the wood as a windbreak finally clearing the ridge and disappearing from sight.

As the Ospreys call faded away I wondered how long it would be before we saw an Osprey here again and if it would visit the tarn as this one had apparently failed to do.

The answers to both questions were soon forth coming as a very faint but by now familiar cheeping came on the wind.

As the calls became louder the Osprey reappeared over the ridge with the strong wind now up its tail and a mob of 20 crows-jackdaws close behind to hurry it on its way.

Sweeping right over the Hooks Lane area it was soon soaring over the North end of the tarn where it was lost to sight as dark fell - as far as we are aware the 1<sup>st</sup> record of Osprey for the tarn.

A visit to the tarn early next morning drew a blank so hopefully the Osprey had caught an early breakfast and continued its journey.

While the Osprey was once driven to extinction countrywide the Buzzard and Raven were `only` driven to local extinction-both have been rare-or at best infrequent here for decades but are now relatively common-of the two the Buzzard is now a regular tarn bird with up to 5 frequently seen over the tarn and individuals actively hunting the reed beds and Hag area.

The raven ever an opportunist-will feed on any carrion fish or fowl and it was a dead body (of the mutton variety) which in January attracted an unheard of 20 ravens to a field near the tarn.

And finally although unrelated to the tarn mention must be made of a local resident who visited Bardsea shore early in the New Year and p-p-p-picked up a penguin or as he correctly identified a Little Auk- a sea going resident of the Arctic blown inshore by gales-only about the size of a starling in a neat black and white suit it is a penguin in everything but name and a bird I for one have never seen- nice one Mr Bolt.

Any similar sightings of unusual wildlife-behaviour-numbers etc in the local area are always of interest and will be considered for inclusion in future reports.