

WILDLIFE REPORT
SEPT 04 –APRIL 05

Management on the tarn and its surrounds has continued with some -- hrs or –days of work carried out on both general maintenance and on going projects.

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 an area which was largely dead overgrown bramble-elder and hedge is now greening up nicely.

On the landing some of the trees in the `shelter belt` have been cut back to open the area up-others have had their branches cut off in situ and await the chainsaw.

On the top section of the Hag 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 until a short time ago a thick reed bed 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 but `soften its appearance to the human eye.

Larger willow branches thinned from the Croft area have been driven into deeper water 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.

In the main reed bed regrowth on some of the felled willow stumps has been cut back and burnt, a small pond and a section of shallow ditch have been cleared of silt to maintain the areas diversity.

In the Croft itself 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 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 tarns wildlife front during the period the unmistakable `wheoo` calls of Wigeon were heard over the tarn on Dec 12th -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 4th 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 Haliaeetus 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 the next Osprey here 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-the 1st 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-always rare here both 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.