

## URSWICK TARN ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT –WILDLIFE REPORT- APRIL-OCTOBER 2005

As usual no major management work has been carried out during the breeding season the usual path maintenance continued and as the summer progressed more effort was concentrated on grass cutting on the Hag.

During late summer into Autumn randomly sized areas of grass have been cut resulting –as can be seen in- a mosaic of different areas from rank old growth to newly cut.

Underneath the grass is a thick `thatch` -decades of dead grass-which has been burnt-raked off to give something other than rank grass a chance to survive.

Altogether an area approx 550 sq m has now been cut the biggest area ever by a considerable margin.

More recently work has been undertaken to keep the bramble `islands` on the landing in check-cut back the path and road verges and trim the catwalk bank.

In total some 100 hrs has been spent on management during the period.

Those who remember the Japanese Knotweed saga of some time ago-when this foreign invader was mistakenly thought to be taking over the tarn-will no doubt be reassured to learn that although odd shoots continue to spring up (and be treated) the vast majority of this plant is now dead.

Unfortunately as one alien plant is dealt with another appears-Himalayan Balsam with its seed pods which explode firing seeds several metres –has appeared near the bonfire site, presumably brought with garden rubbish.

This is another waterside plant which with its seeding habits is capable of colonizing large areas so any seedlings which may appear need to be pulled as soon as possible.

On the wildlife front a reported sighting of something rather more exotic caused a minor stir during April when a large `cat` was seen in the village.

Said to be `twice the size of a normal moggy with a long thick bushy tail and v shaped ears` the cat was considered to be either wildcat or lynx.

It may or may not be significant that the sighting was reported by patrons leaving the General Burgoyne but whatever the beasts true identity there appear to have been no further sightings.

Cuckoos have become increasingly rare locally so one calling briefly early one morning in May was the first I personally have heard here for quite some time, a Lesser Whitethroat singing from bushes in May was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> I've ever seen in this area.

Also in May the Great Crested Grebes produced 3 young and thanks to the considerable number of small fish in the tarn feeding them was not a problem, during one period four out of five dives producing a fish.

The main success story of the year has been yet another increase in the numbers of Reed Warblers with at least 6 calling at any one time and for the first time being noted in almost every area of the tarn edge.

Mute swans nested for the first time in some years and for a time all went well but following `Whit` week both swans were seen on the tarn-with no cygnets.

During a check of the nest site abandoned swan eggs were found with small holes in them. At first glance it appeared that the usual avian suspects-the egg stealing magpies or crows –could have pecked the eggs but they would surely have eaten the contents.

On closer inspection the holes in the eggs proved to be blunt as if tapped with a stick rather than `stabbed` by a beak and a faint trampled `people` path led through the reeds to the nest.

Sadly the eggs contained perfectly formed cygnets which within a day or two would have been swimming safely on the tarn.

During what has been a relatively poor summer for butterflies the recently arrived `Speckled Wood` managed to increase-albeit slightly-with a maximum of 4 seen on the landing and at least 6 in a local wood.

Another butterfly which is slowly spreading in the area the `Gatekeeper` has also been seen on the brambly areas of the Hag-landing, hopefully it is now a resident.

A possible sighting of a southern European migrant earlier in the summer was confirmed on the 9<sup>th</sup> September when a Humming Bird Hawk moth was seen feeding on various flowers.

As its name suggests this day flying moth resembles a tiny humming bird hovering in front of flowers as it feeds its wings a blur making an audible hum.

On the fishing front there have been encouraging signs of improvement with a variety of species caught and some good sized fish reported.

Also encouraging was the fact that there are now many smaller fish in the tarn which proved fairly easy to catch for some of the younger kids.

When asked why they weren't fishing from the gaps along the catwalk bank some of the kids explained they couldn't as there was too much weed in the `swims`. something we could bear in mind for next year. and perhaps rake the swims out.

A period of better weather during late summer led to an increase in night fishing , unfortunately it also led to the kind of mindless activities which seem to provide a laugh for the few but spoil the area for everyone else and as usual the resulting mess has to be cleaned up by others.

`Booze` seemed to play a large part in the proceedings with literally scores of cans thrown in the tarn and strewn around the area on several occasions along with all manner of plastic bags etc.

Considered opinion was that colder weather would `solve` the problem, the problems have indeed temporarily ceased but not before the disappearance of the fishing sign-and the appearance of various toiletries in the bushes.

Of the various vehicles driven down to the tarn edge one apparently snapped off the new `wheelie` litter bin on which an obscene message was written `requesting` the Assoc Chairman empty the bin .

No wonder then that some people felt so intimidated they began to avoid the area.

Despite the view of many that those responsible should be left in a mess of their own making it was decided to replace the wheelie bin in a bid to keep the area tidy.

On the morning of Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October the bin was replaced its post concreted back in-job complete by 1pm.

A return visit at 4pm the same afternoon found a wheelie bin vandalized yet again-its post pushed over – its metal clasp battered flat with a big rock and yet more rubbish left on the tarn edge.

Hopefully the kids fishing there in the afternoon who were thought to be responsible for the damage were not local.

It's perhaps symptomatic of today's `blind eye` philosophy that in the middle of a Sunday afternoon no one appears to have seen or heard or reported anything!