

A summary of the impact of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust in 2020 - 2021

Annual Review

2020 - 2021



Lincolnshire
Wildlife Trust



Message from the Chair

It is clearer now, more than ever before, that the health of humanity is inextricably linked to the health of our planet.

We must never forget how wildlife helped us during the pandemic – those moments in nature that lifted our spirits. The first lockdown coincided with the start of spring and I, like so many others, relied on nature close to my home as a source of comfort and hope.

We have been reminded that daily connection with nature is vital for our own health and wellbeing. But nature is still in decline and we are facing the biggest challenges to humanity: the biodiversity and climate crises.

Just as nature helped us cope with the pandemic, nature and natural solutions can show us the way forward.

Whilst we were in lockdown and with our social interactions curtailed, we missed a year of opportunities to talk to people and share our mutual love of local wild places and wildlife. These were also missed opportunities to gain new members and we have seen a slight dip in our membership. It makes you all the more valuable – thank you for staying with us and supporting us through these difficult times.

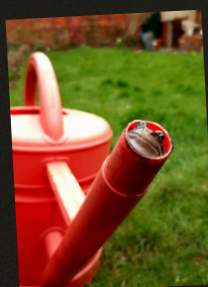
It is with real sadness that I have announced my intention to step down as a Trustee at the AGM in October. It has been an absolute pleasure to have served on the Board for the last twelve years, firstly as Honorary Treasurer and latterly as Chair of Trustees, but I think the time is right to allow others to take on the mantle of leading the Trust.

As you will see from the accounts, the Trust continues to be in a good place financially thanks to your ongoing support and is well placed to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

I know that I am leaving Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust in good heart and have every confidence that the Trust will be able to play a major role in addressing the biodiversity and climate crises within the county, particularly when working at a national level within a network of Wildlife Trusts.

Much uncertainty still lies ahead but as always, we will rely on our members, volunteers and other supporters, whom I thank for all the good work they have done.

David Cohen,
Chair of the Board of Trustees



On the cover:
We all felt a little stuck inside during 2020, just like the frog in Sally Tyler's photo - one of over 200 entries in a new wildlife photography competition held in partnership with The Collection, Lincoln.

The impact of covid-19

This Review covers the financial year from April 2020 and ending March 2021. It was a year like no other and the Covid-19 restrictions clearly had a significant impact on the way we have been able to conduct “business as usual”. However, our staff and volunteers have coped with these challenges in an exemplary manner and we have continued to deliver for nature in Lincolnshire.

Fortunately, we had very few confirmed cases of Covid-19, which speaks volumes for the careful way we have applied government guidelines along with the actions of our staff.

Government restrictions remained in place throughout the year and the Trust's Headquarters, Banovallum House, remained closed to visitors. Whilst some staff were able to maintain a working presence, the majority continued to work from home, and some were furloughed.

Visitor engagement was significantly curtailed, with visitor centres closed for most of the period. There were no formal education visits to nature reserves and centres and our popular events programme was also cancelled, as were external events such as the Lincolnshire Show. Our group activities such as Nature Tots, Wildlife Watch and Area Groups were also put on hold.

Disappointingly, volunteering was significantly restricted, although some specific activity was authorised under tight restrictions including the 'Crane

Watch' at Willow Tree Fen. Volunteers are essential to the success of the Trust and we are looking forward to welcoming these dedicated people back.

Work on the Love Lincs Plants project had to be suspended as we were unable to undertake essential fieldwork and training but an extension has been granted by National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing us to complete this important work during 2021.

However, despite all of this, our work continued. This included a range of advocacy work with government and others at a national level. This work has covered The Environment Act, the marine environment, planning reform, Nature Recovery Networks, and the Build Back Better campaign, all of which are important to us in Lincolnshire but are best approached through a concerted national effort.

We continued to produce our top-quality magazine, *Lapwings*, which received some very favourable feedback. Social media was particularly active, and the

Trust's website saw a significant increase in visitors.

Work on reserves included carrying out essential management work, checking livestock and ensuring reserves were safe for people to visit particularly in light of changing Government guidance.

As the first lockdown eased, Trust nature reserves and the wider countryside came under huge pressure from increased numbers of visitors. This led to many undesirable impacts including littering and vandalism. However, the appetite to experience the countryside has shown the need for good quality green space close to people's homes where wildlife can thrive and people can learn and connect with nature.

All of this has demonstrated that our work and our mission to save wildlife has never been more important.



There was an impressive list of breeding bird firsts on our nature reserves, in part arising from the tranquillity during the first Covid-19 lockdown. These included the cranes at Willow Tree Fen, little egret (left) at Gibraltar Point and woodlark (right) at Epworth Turbary nature reserve.

Helping nature's recovery

We are implementing real conservation change in Lincolnshire. During the year, the Wildlife Trusts launched the 30 by 30 campaign calling for at least 30% of our land and sea to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030. Our nature reserves are a vital part of this, but to achieve it we need to work with and influence others.

Despite the pandemic, the work of the Trust didn't stop and our nature reserves continued to provide a home to many of the county's rarest and most threatened wildlife.

Nature reserves are at the heart of what we do. We now care for almost 100, covering 3,877 hectares of land. They are havens where wildlife can thrive and are also places where everyone can experience the natural world. Who would have thought just a few years back that you would be able to hear the booming of bitterns and the bugling of cranes?

We care for some of the best of Lincolnshire's hay meadows and ancient bluebell woodlands. These habitats have been managed in the same way for centuries. In order to maintain the rich diversity of wildlife, we continue some of the same management principles and continued to do so throughout the pandemic. Hay crops were taken, woodland thinned and coppiced and sheep, cattle and ponies grazed many of our sites – helping to manage the vegetation for a range of different species. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people,

especially our regular contractors, who worked with us over the course of the year.

But we don't always follow tradition. More innovative approaches to management are also used and new nature reserves have been created on former arable and industrial land.

As outlined in last year's *Annual Review*, we were delighted when common cranes raised a single chick at Willow Tree Fen. When the land was purchased in 2009, it had been growing wheat and beans. The fact that just 11 years later, the first crane chick in Lincolnshire for 400 years was born is remarkable and shows how nature can recover if given a chance. The three birds continued to use the reserve as a roost site until October, whilst feeding in the agricultural fields nearby.

Willow Tree Fen was re-opened once the cranes had left for the winter, enabling some much-needed management work to be completed. We're happy to report that all three birds returned in late January 2021.

At Far Ings National Nature Reserve, major management of the reedbeds over

the winter period involved digging new channels and pools. This breathes new life into the reedbeds and prevents them from drying out. The work has paid off spectacularly with regular sightings of otters, two successful bittern nests, two marsh harrier nests that fledged six young, 19 pairs of bearded tits and 18 Cetti's warbler territories.

If nature reserves are core to the work of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, they are also core to the idea of a nature recovery network. They are the richest areas for wildlife from which species can expand when conditions are suitable. During the year, the Wildlife Trusts launched the 30 by 30 campaign calling for at least 30% of our land and sea to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030.

Beyond the nature reserves

Lincolnshire is an agricultural county and we have worked with landowners and farmers for many years and continued to do so over the past year. However, we need to do more to move towards the ambitious goal of 30%. The Government will soon be introducing new Environmental Land Management Schemes which will replace the current agri-environment schemes. The aim will be to pay farmers for delivering services for the public good – such as improved access, water and soil quality and greater biodiversity. The Trust are at the forefront of helping to shape this work and during the year were awarded two trial schemes that will help steer this new policy.

During the year, our conservation team continued to work across the county, responding to threats to wildlife and working with various partners to deliver on the ground conservation. A key part of this is offering practical advice – for example, we delivered virtual training packages on wildlife friendly farming and water management to farmers who grow vegetables for Birds Eye.

The Environment Agency's *State of our Rivers* report, published in September, presented a shocking picture



RUTH TAYLOR

Despite a booking system being put in place to manage numbers of visitors, the Seal Viewing Area at Donna Nook had to be closed when restrictions were reintroduced, disappointing the many visitors normally attracted to this annual event.



“26,000 of you support us as members. We couldn’t have done any of this without you. Thank you for believing in and supporting the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.”

Paul Learoyd, Chief Executive

of England’s watercourses. All rivers are at the mercy of whatever happens in their catchment and we are taking action to improve the state of Lincolnshire’s rivers. This included hosting two of the Environment Agency’s Catchment Partnerships in the Ancholme Valley and the Northern Becks, and working closely with the Lincolnshire Chalk Streams Project.

Working in partnership is key to delivering more for nature and we were excited to work with our colleagues at the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust on a successful bid to trial the re-introduction of seagrass and oysters which once thrived in the Humber estuary.

It was disappointing that despite protests and many of you supporting our campaign, a badger cull in Lincolnshire was approved. We are particularly concerned about the quality of data used to make the decision and continue to work with regional and national colleagues to overturn this decision.

Connecting people and nature

Whilst we were not able to deliver the usual suite of engagement with the public, we put a great deal of time and effort into online activities and helping people to enjoy nature close to home. Throughout the year, visitors to our website and followers on our social media increased markedly. Sharing experiences of nature, sightings and records of wildlife lifted our spirits. Thank you to everyone who joined us on social media and shared your wildlife photos and experiences.

As the lockdown lifted, staff ensured a regular presence on our main visitor sites to help people to enjoy the reserves →

A heartfelt thank you to our corporate members, funders and partners

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for Bedfordshire,
Cambridgeshire and
Northamptonshire

Remembering Lincolnshire’s wildlife

We are extremely grateful for the generosity of those supporters who choose to leave a gift for wildlife in their Will. We are honoured to record our appreciation to the following individuals whose legacies we received or were notified of in the year ended 31 March 2021.

Neville Geoffrey Arthurs
Edward Backus
Derek Barnett
Julie Bilton
Eileen Mabel Briggs
Lord Martin Hugh Broadbridge
Phyllis Jean Bruning
Derek Alwyn Clay

Ethel Mary Cockerill
Julian Robert Hill
Margaret Annie Medland
Helen Margaret Outram
Alan George Riseborough
Kathleen Smith
Sylvia May Smith
Winifred Margaret Spilman



responsibly and engage with what was often a new audience. We are hopeful that the experiences of lockdown have given many people a greater appreciation of the value of local green space and the provision this is something we will continue to push for.

Volunteers have always been at the heart of everything we do – from helping on our nature reserves, to running at events, Watch Groups and in our visitor centres and even serving on the Board of Trustees. Nothing in the Trust would be possible without our volunteers. This year, for the first time ever, the role of volunteers had to be reduced. Our Area Groups are a hugely important link between the Trust and our supporters and sadly, every Group's programme of events had to be put on hold whilst we followed the Government's guidance on tackling Coronavirus. Gradually we hope things will return to normality and the Trust is committed to helping our volunteers, in whatever way they were involved, to resume their involvement as things hopefully return to normal.

2020/21 will be regarded as one of the most challenging in the history of the Trust. At one point around a third of staff were on furlough and our capacity to deliver was much reduced. Nevertheless, wildlife thrived on our reserves, people made new connections to the natural world on their doorstep and we continued to stand up for nature across the county. 🐾

Protecting and managing wild places

3,877

hectares of Lincolnshire's finest countryside were protected and managed as Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves.

280,000

people visited Whisby Nature Park an increase of 15% on the previous year despite effective closure during the month of April. 🦋

1,500+

hours were spent by volunteers watching over the cranes at Willow Tree Fen to ensure that they were free from disturbance. 🦢

2,214

grey seal pups were born at Donna Nook National Nature Reserve. Despite the site's closure, wardens remained on duty with some volunteer support.

10 million+

records of 13,273 individual species have been logged on the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre database.

62

flowering spikes of marsh gentian were recorded at Scotton Common nature reserve – the only place in Lincolnshire where this flower occurs.

41

hours were spent by seven volunteers watching the sea for whales and dolphins over one weekend in August. Nine harbour porpoises were seen. 🐋

2,000+

species of invertebrates have been recorded on Trust reserves over the last decade. 🐝

Financial summary

When the pandemic began in March 2020, the board immediately reviewed the finances with the aim of reducing the forecast budget deficit and to ensure that our cashflow was carefully managed.

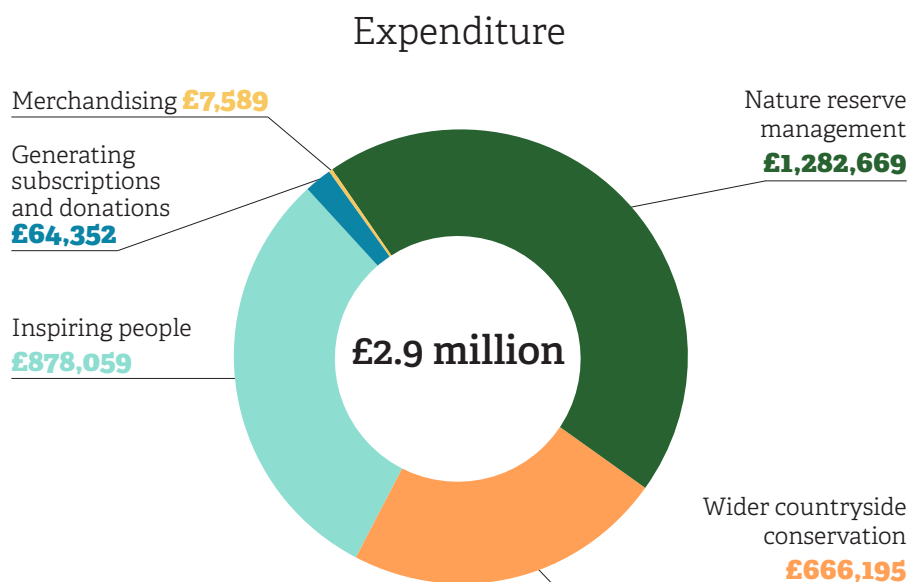
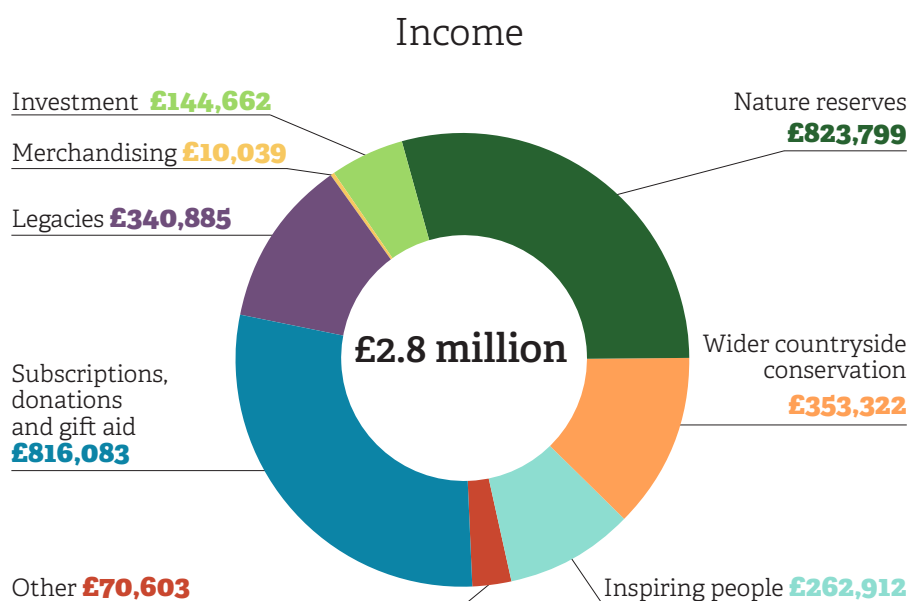
As with many businesses and charities, Government assistance during the pandemic helped the Trust during this difficult time. Several Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grants were received during the year along with support from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The Trust also took advantage of the opportunity to take out a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan.

With the cessation of so many activities, our income was significantly affected. Lockdown restrictions lead to the closure of the Trust's visitor centres, curtailing catering and retail activity. In addition, all educational visits and public events were cancelled, including at the normally popular Donna Nook.

Unrestricted income fell by 25% from £2.6 million to £2.0 million, primarily as a result of a reduction in unrestricted legacy income which was £341,000 compared to £881,000 in 2020. Proactive membership recruitment was also not possible for most of the year which meant that membership at the year-end fell by 6% to 25,971 members. The result was a fall in total income from £3.5 million to £2.8 million.

Despite all of this, the Trust ended the year with an overall surplus of £720,000 compared to £387,000 last year. The financial support and actions outlined above made a significant difference but the year-end position was in large part, due to a rise in the value of the Trust's unrestricted investments. These increased by £675,000, reversing the loss of £270,000 seen at the end of the last financial year at a time when the pandemic was first having an impact.

Through careful stewardship, the Trust ended 2020/21 having weathered many of the financial challenges that the pandemic presented.



Summary of our income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2021.
Full details can be found in our audited Annual Report and Financial Statements at lincstrust.org.uk/publications

Thank you for your support

Building a better future

Looking ahead to putting the biodiversity and climate crises at the heart of Lincolnshire's recovery from the pandemic.

The reality is that our work will continue to be influenced by the impact and response to the pandemic. But we must also play our role in tackling the biodiversity and climate crises.

Clearly there is much to do but there is also much to be gained. We believe that the ambition and determination that saw the Trust through its first seventy years, can see us through the next critical years to a wilder future with

more space for wildlife to thrive.

We have already saved land and rescued habitats, enabling them to keep on capturing carbon rather than releasing it into the atmosphere. We have created nature reserves that also help to store water, thus reducing the risk of flooding. We have helped species that were once lost from Lincolnshire, such as bitterns and otters, to return.

As we come out of the restrictions

of the pandemic, we will be gearing up to lead the way to nature's recovery in Lincolnshire. There will once again be opportunities for people to volunteer and we will reinvigorate our programme of events, activities and educational visits, helping everyone connect with wildlife and empowering all to take action.

Thank you for your support and for being part of nature's recovery in Lincolnshire.

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

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Brian Tear (Vice President)

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Anita Quigley (Deputy Chair)
Julian Purvis (Honorary Treasurer)
Michael Burgass (appointed 24.10.20)
Emma Buyers (appointed 24.10.20)
Grace Corn (appointed 24.10.20)

Kitty Hamilton (appointed 24.10.20)

Janet Mellor

Robert Oates

Stef Round

Tim Sands

David Sheppard

Cathy Sirett (appointed 24.10.20)

Mark Smith

Beth Tyrrel

SENIOR STAFF:

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Head of Conservation: Tammy Smalley

Head of Finance: Sarah J Smith

Head of Nature Reserves: David Bromwich

Head of Public Engagement & Communications: Matthew Capper

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