

# **WARP Annual Report to Parish Council**

Once again we have been delighted with the support we have received from the village for the ongoing work our team of volunteers do each month to keep the Washpoll Area looking attractive. Also, as chair of the management committee I would like to thank my fellow committee members for all their efforts over the past year ensuring all the “behind the scenes” tasks involved in running this project actually happen.

## **Events**

In my last report I said that we hope to hold more events to encourage community involvement in the project and hopefully raise further funds.

So far this year we have held our annual Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Saturday. Despite the fact that there were other similar events being held in the locality we were gratified to find that our event was still very popular and only just had sufficient eggs purchased to reward all comers.

Last year's Duck Race in the stream was a resounding success. So much so we had to disappoint many people who turned up after all the ducks had been sold.

This year we have bought another 100 ducks and plan to have heats before a final race, thus extending the fun. We are a bit concerned that the lack of rain this past winter and spring has resulted in the level of water in the stream being rather lower than would be expected at this time of year. We plan to hold a rehearsal prior to the actual race to check the feasibility of holding the race. Unfortunately, the erratic weather patterns we experience these days is one of our biggest headaches running this project

Another event, held for the first time last year was a Sheep's Birthday Party as the sheep were known to have reached 10 years of age. We do not know the exact birthdate of any of the sheep so an 'official' date was decided on. Once again, the event was well attended and extremely popular so we intend to make it an annual event.

## **Trees**

We continue to have problems with trees being brought down by winter storms. This is particularly problematic if it falls on one of our stock fences since it then has to be removed and the fence repaired. This is usually ash trees but last winter a large sycamore growing on the hillside lost a substantial branch which fell across the fence and blocked the stream.

Whilst we appreciate stacks of rotting wood are a valuable habitat for insects etc we have far too much fallen wood.

Where possible we leave stacks where the more energetic residents can collect it for their wood burning stoves but a lot of it has to be disposed of on site by burning. We combine this with some sort of celebration for our volunteers, usually a Hallowe'en party.

This year the project benefited from a large donation from a recently bereaved family in the village who asked mourners to donate to WARP for the purchase of trees rather than spend money on flowers for their late husband/father's funeral. We have used the money to buy a wide variety of native trees that have been planted across the site last December. Now that spring is here it is gratifying to see them coming to life.

## **Thames Water**

Our last report mentioned issues we were having with an unstable bank which kept collapsing into the stream during exceptionally heavy rain. We were puzzled as to why the collapse always occurred in the same place. It later transpired that there was a massive outflow from a manhole taking storm water to the sewage pumping station because the pipe after that point was well and truly blocked. Because of its location, repairs were extremely difficult. Thames Water constructed a huge scaffolding structure down the hillside so that their contractors could work safely.

The scaffolding had to remain in place for a number of months until they were satisfied that the blockage had been successfully cleared. They then reinstated the bank, covered it with soil and seeded it. This is now starting to green up nicely.

So far there have been no further incidents of water pouring from the manhole although last winter was unusually dry so their handiwork has yet to be fully tested.

## **Sheep**

As mentioned above, our flock of sheep is now over ten years old. An unusually advanced age for a sheep to reach and sadly, we lost Cromarty, one of our Soays in February due to old age.

When we first got sheep in Washpool we thought they would be purely for land management purposes, keeping down the vegetation on the steep hillside that we were unable to maintain with volunteers. However, they have contributed so much more.

Chiefly, they have brought life to the valley and made it a particular attraction for young families. We noticed this particularly during the pandemic lockdowns when with zoos and wildlife parks closed to the public a visit to “going see the sheep” provided a welcome distraction.

Inevitably, we will lose the rest of the original flock over the next year or so but because we view their presence as such a valuable asset to the project we would like to replace them with more sheep over time.

To this end we have already acquired two young Shetland sheep. We chose this breed because they have a reputation for being friendly; a quality we have learnt to value in our flock. In addition, they are a small breed so will not need so much supplementary hay during the winter and they can also survive on very poor pasture such as we have.

Keeping a flock of sheep is not cheap however. Aside from the cost of acquiring them and transporting them to our site there is the annual cost of shearing them, worming them and treating them with a solution to prevent fly strike. Also we have to buy hay to feed them through the winter months. Because we don't have the resources that a owners of a commercial flock would have we are obliged to buy small “man liftable” bales to that our volunteers can manage to feed them. Needless to say, this is not the cheapest way to buy hay.

When we acquired the first flock we were unlucky enough to have one of the herdwick's badly injured, soon after, by a small terrier dog that managed to slip into the field. Knowing we would not be able to afford the high vet bills that would be incurred treating him we set up a ‘Just Giving’ appeal. The community responded so generously the resulting sum not only successfully treated Eric's injuries but left us with enough money to fund the flock's welfare ever since. Inevitably, after such a long time, this amount is nearly exhausted so we propose to have a new “Just Giving” appeal to acquire a new flock and keep sheep in Washpool.

In closing we would like to thank the Parish Council once again for all the support they have given us over the past year not only with funding but also providing the necessary insurce to cover our fund raising events.