

## Wood Lane Nature Reserve, Ellesmere 23/05/2022

Organisers: Helen Siddons and Jane Phillips

On a rather dull morning, 24 members met in the Reserve car park, where we were introduced to Stuart Lawrence, Operations Manager for Tudor Griffiths, who own the quarry. He explained how the Reserve had been created from old sand and gravel workings as a co-operative venture between TG Group and Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Several large lagoons with islands and surrounding wetlands were formed, with pumps keeping the water at optimum levels for the birds. As a result 180 species of bird have so far been recorded visiting the site.

As the rain started we made our way to a large teaching hide, where we enjoyed our lunch looking over one of the lagoons. After lunch everybody climbed aboard a large trailer for a tour of the working quarry. Fortunately, though open-sided it did have a roof, which we certainly appreciated when the heavens opened half way round the tour!

Members were treated to a fascinating tour of the complex operation, starting with areas where we saw sand and gravel being excavated and taken for processing. This involves washing several times to separate sand from gravel and also to extract the clay residue, which is later useful for lining the lagoons. Great care is taken to remove minerals from the resulting waste water to prevent contamination of nearby Colemere with its rare ecology. We passed mountains of the separated sand where we saw many Sand Martins flying around. Stuart explained that as soon as they are noticed, nesting areas are cordoned off until the young have fledged.

We were taken to a viewing platform from where we were able to see areas of land in various stages of excavation and restoration. We saw a landfill site that had been turned into a field which is now grazed and cut for hay. It was explained that the methane given off by landfill is captured and utilised. The trailer then took us into two huge sheds where waste materials from commercial, construction and agricultural businesses, as well as domestic waste are processed. Over 80% of all waste received is recycled, with plastic by far the most problematic material.

At the end of the tour we thanked Stuart for giving us such an amazing insight into the quarrying and recycling world. It was reassuring to see what can be achieved when industry dedicates itself to minimising detriment to the environment and maximizing positive outcomes, through partnerships with organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts.

As the rain had eased by now members were able to spend time in the hides overlooking the lagoons and by the end of the day 31 species of bird had been seen. The highlight for many was watching a female Kingfisher, quite close to one of the hides, bringing fish back to its nest then posing for us one of the perches before flying off to do it all again! Meanwhile a pair of Oystercatchers were busy protecting their two chicks from the attentions of interested Carrion Crows.

Afterwards we enjoyed tea at Whittington Castle. All in all an enjoyable and extremely informative day.

Report: Helen Siddons and Jane Phillips

