

Grass Roots Conservation Group

# Annual Report

Financial Year: 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023



*Brackagh Moss      October 2022*

# Grassroots

**CONSERVATION GROUP**

Charity No: NIC 102932

## Introduction – Purposes

Grass Roots Conservation Group ('Grass Roots') is a charity registered with the NI Charity Commissioners, number NIC102932. The public address is: 11 Wynchurch Avenue, Belfast BT6 0JP

The Purpose of the Group (as registered with the Charity Commissioners) is to benefit the general public through the conservation, protection and enhancement of the environment on the island of Ireland.

Grass Roots is governed by the Constitution as last amended on 10 October 2015, which is available from the Secretary. The Trustees of Grass Roots during the Financial Year 2022-23 were:

Dr. Anne Hardcastle (Chair)  
Mr. Clive Harvey (Treasurer)  
Ms. Pauline White (Membership Secretary)  
Mr. Sam Hastings  
Ms. Janis Lunn  
Mr. Ken Orr (Secretary)  
Mr. Robert Shearman (Task Organiser)  
Ms. Nicola Paul

## Secretary's Report on Activities and Achievements

During the period of this report, we were able to emerge further from the shadow of the pandemic. A very full programme of work was put in place, with a remarkable 25 work days scheduled between April 2022 and March 2023, though three of these had to be cancelled for differing reasons. Volunteer numbers were up a little from the last two years, though still not back to pre-pandemic levels.



*Figure 1 The traditional bonfire at Saintfield*

The programme was varied, including familiar sites such as Saintfield Estate and Rea's Wood at Antrim and new ones such as Hugh's Meadow, a nature reserve being constructed near Parkgate. October Wood, Carryduff, is now a regular and well-loved site and our thanks again go to Alexey Janes for providing several days' work in the woodland and hosting our established Christmas Decorations workshop.



*Figure 2 Different styles of fencing at Hugh's Meadow and October Wood - ideal work for Duke of Edinburgh participants*



Another established fixture in the programme is an August day of seed collection along with Debbie Gillies of True Harvest Seeds. This year we went to Minnowburn and gathered two conservation grade collections, of pendulous sedge and cow parsley, to be added to the Irish seedbank near Ballyhornan. Mentioning Ballyhornan, we had a beautiful day of sunshine for our annual beach clean there; overall the levels of litter were down on previous years but there was far too much plastic, and far too much fishing-related debris.



*Figure 3 Seed collection at Minnowburn*



Michael and Judy Meharg again provided several days' work at their new woodland at Dundrod, and at Tolan's Point. We also enjoyed outings to Brackagh Moss and Craigavon Lakes for scrub clearance work for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon council; the latter site is home to the scarce cryptic wood white butterfly and our work there is to remove willow and birch to preserve open grassland essential for the butterfly.



*Figure 4 Never daunted by a wall of Himalayan balsam at Tolan's Point...even on an absurdly wet day.*

A first for Grass Roots was a Food Foraging day, held at Lagan Meadows, which turned out to be a really special event! Our leader, Clare McQuillan, was so knowledgeable about the plants to be found in Lagan Valley Regional Park, and the stories of their uses through the ages. After a morning spent collecting a variety of herbs, flowers and leaves, we cooked the most delicious lunch, accompanied by an elderflower champagne. Funding for this event was kindly provided by Lough Neagh Partnership.



*Figure 5 Foraging at Lagan Meadows*



Funding was also provided, as part of the same scheme, for two of the committee to undertake a City and Guilds course in Knapsack Spraying. Grass Roots never uses pesticides, but there are occasions when we need to use herbicides to control invasive species; usually this is by direct application but it is useful to have a spraying capability if the need should arise. The C & G course was intensive, interesting and enjoyable, with both practical and on-line examinations at the end, and result in a qualification which is not time limited. Thanks to Lisa Allen of Lough Neagh Partnership for making the arrangements.

The Ballynature Show took place again in March 2023, for the first time since the pandemic, and Grass Roots stand attracted a lot of interest.



We also restarted our Summer outing, this year to a variety of locations centred around Randalstown and Garvagh. The Viaduct Garden at Randalstown, an enigmatic Pyramid in Garvagh Forest and Garvagh Museum were new venues for most of us, and amounted to a very enjoyable day out; thanks to Janis for doing the preparation work.



*Figure 6 Randalstown Viaduct Garden and the Garvagh Pyramid*

## Governance

During 2022-23, we completed a thorough review and updating of our Safeguarding Policies, along with a complete revision of our Risk Assessments. All of these are now available on the Grass Roots website, [www.grassrootsni.org](http://www.grassrootsni.org). The security of the website itself was improved by obtaining an SSL certificate (so that the site now shows up as <https://>, and transactions with the site are encrypted), and all documents on site are now stored as pdf.

Private benefit to individuals continued to arise in ways that are incidental and necessary to ensure that benefit is provided to the general public. Private benefit to trustees and volunteers in the form of reimbursement of expenses was limited to only those expenses actually incurred in carrying out conservation activities. Any private benefit arising from social activities was judged necessary to contribute to team building. Private benefit to individuals, who own land where Grass Roots work, was judged to be proportionate to the public benefit resulting from the group's activities.

The Trustees of Grass Roots Conservation Group have taken due regard to the Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

## **Trustees' Review of Financial position**

In compliance with the guidance issued by the Charity Commissioners, our Accounts have been examined by an Independent Examiner. No funds held by Grass Roots Conservation Group are materially in deficit.

Overall expenditure almost exactly balanced income for the year, and reserves continue to be very healthy. The cash held on deposit is sufficient to provide security for any adverse circumstances likely to arise.

Thanks are due to our Treasurer, Mr. Clive Harvey, for his usual very thorough job on preparing the accounts, and to our Independent Assessor Mrs. Marjorie Guiler.

Dr. A. Hardcastle (Chair)      date: