



## Members' Interests

Sheila Farmer

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When we sent out the invitations to renew your membership this year we asked you what your main areas of interest were. It was intended to help the Committee to get a better idea of the interests of our members. Obviously it could not be a comprehensive questionnaire. Thank you to all those of you who filled in this section. We have also included the same questions on the application forms for new members.

So far this year we have had 263 membership forms returned (from single people and families). 236 applicants had filled in our simple questionnaire. Of these the majority had ticked "Birds", but there is clearly a lot of interest in other areas. The following table shows the proportion of the completed forms in each of the five different categories.

Category	Percentage of completed Questionnaires.
Birds	96 %
Mammals	20 %
Butterflies	31 %
Dragonflies	19 %
Plants	23 %

On quite a lot of forms members had ticked more than one category, which explains why the sum of all the classes appears to be greater than 100% !! The proportion of application forms with all the five categories ticked was 7%, showing that some members have very widespread interests.

This very simple survey shows that there is a wide range of interests displayed by our members. The Moor Green Lakes site is not simply a bird reserve but in the truest sense it is a nature reserve. This emphasises the interplay there is between the various types of plants and animals. The dragonfly nymphs prey on small invertebrates in the aquatic phase and then the adult dragonflies prey on smaller insects, but they in their turn are hunted and eaten by the hobbies. The goldfinches feed on the thistle heads, the green woodpeckers forage for ants and the kingfishers dive for fish.

We are trying to build up a comprehensive picture of the wildlife on the Reserve. Various members have volunteered to become official Recorders for the Group and the current list of Recorders is given below. Recording sheets have also been put up in both hides. Please use them to the full. If you have additional observations please do not hesitate to contact the Recorders direct.

Perhaps you have expertise in a particular field and could help the present Recorders in some of their survey work. Or perhaps you have knowledge about an area not covered so far. We are still looking for someone who has specialist knowledge of bees and wasps. And what of ants, spiders and fish? We do employ outside specialists from time to time for some survey work, but surely with over 400 members there must be a lot of untapped experience waiting to be exploited. Please help to make our Reserve even better!

### Recorders

Birds: Ian Brown,  
4 Evesham Walk, SANDHURST, GU46 0YU  
Tel: 01344 778412

Plants: Delphine Hoyle,  
384 Finchampstead Road, WOKINGHAM, RG40 3LA  
Tel: 01734 732545





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Dragonflies: Ken Crick,  
29 Village Way, YATELEY, GU17 7SE  
Tel: 01252 872508

Butterflies: Sue Proudley,  
34 Weybridge Mead, YATELEY, GU46 7UY  
Tel: 01252 875536

Mammals: Katrina Slocombe,  
28 Green Lane, BLACKWATER, GU17 9DH  
Tel: 01276 35062

Reptiles: Peter Scott,  
55 Globe Farm Lane, BLACKWATER, GU17 0DZ  
Tel: 01252 878205

Bats and Other Records:  
Steve Bailey,  
BVCS, Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, ALDERSHOT,  
GU11 2PS Tel: 01252 331353 (work)  
Tel: 01252 513287 (home)

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## The Year 2002 at Moor Green Lakes

The year 2002 was a year of mixed fortunes at Moor Green Lakes according to our Recorders. The following is a brief summary of some of the main activities on the Reserve. Full reports will be included in the Annual Report for 2002, which will be published in July 2003.

*Ken Crick* reports that damselflies started to emerge early in the Blackwater Valley as the result of the weather being dry and mild in early to mid April. Large Red Damselflies were seen on 16 April at Bramshill. However by the end of April the weather had become wet and cold and all evidence of dragonfly life vanished. Two species of Odenata which are used as key indicator species for the Reserve both suffered a massive drop in population levels when compared with annual averages for the last five years. This trend was mirrored by other species that usually have high population numbers at Moor Green Lakes.

Ken also reports that the survey of water acidity/alkalinity on the Reserve, which was started in June 2001, was continued through to June 2002. At 9 out of 12 of the measurement locations the pH readings at the end of the period were within 0.3 of the original June 2001 figures, despite the large range of values recorded through the year.

*Steve Bailey* reports that the three year study of bats at Moor Green is nearing completion. This is mainly based on quantifiable and repeatable transects carried out in 2000 and 2001 around Colebrook Lake and since 1998 along the River Blackwater. These fixed point transects will be invaluable in monitoring changes in bat populations over the years but the intensity of effort required prevents getting a complete view of the whole Reserve over a full year.

Surveys this year were targeted at filling in some of the gaps from the transects and have been successful in discovering Natterer's bat as a new species for the Reserve as well as confirming Long-eared bat which had not been picked up during the transects. The discovery of Natterer's bats is particularly interesting, as this is only the third record of a non-hibernating bat of this species in the Blackwater Valley. This year Pipistrelle bats were also discovered using two of the bat boxes on the Reserve for the first time.





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*Katrina Slocombe* says that the more intensive surveys may sometimes prove unproductive, such as occurred when she attempted a springtime survey of small mammals using live traps. For the two rainy nights of "pre-trapping" when the traps are locked open, much of the food "delicacies" provided - hamster food and chocolate drops (said to be much favoured by voles and mice) showed evidence of disturbance and nibbling. On the night the traps were set to lock closed on entry the weather was fine and dry. This obviously encouraged the mammals to travel further for more natural food and when she returned in the morning not one of the traps had been triggered!

In contrast, she would like to thank members for completing the new Mammal Sightings List provided in the Hides. These are providing a useful monitor of the movements around Moor Green of the larger mammals and even some of the shy small mammals which refuse to enter her traps! She would like to encourage members to continue entering their observations on these lists. Members have reported deer, foxes, rabbits, squirrels, weasels and even a mole. However perhaps the most interesting report was from Sue Proudley who spotted a mink near the Grove Hide.

*Ian Brown* reports that at the beginning of the year duck numbers were generally down compared to recent years but nevertheless there was still a good variety on offer including a record count for the site of 54 Shoveler in February and a Pintail. Goosander still roosted in moderate numbers throughout. However, there was a very good selection of other species including Barn Owl, Peregrine, a large flock of Brambling, Merlin (only second recorded individual on the site), Mediterranean Gull and Bittern whilst the Green Winged Teal remained into the new year until late January.

Considering the water levels were relatively high throughout the spring there was a good selection of passage waders in quality if not quantity, including Black Tailed Godwit, 3 Oystercatchers, an early Wood Sandpiper, Curlew, Greenshank, Dunlin and Little Stint. Other records included the second site record of Garganey plus Little Egret, Common Scoter and a good scattering of passerines such as Wheatear and Whinchat.

Overall the breeding season was successful for a wide range of species, most notably the first successful breeding of Gadwall after many years of waiting! Waders enjoyed moderate success with Redshank and Lapwing both rearing young although Little Ringed Plover failed. Once again the most obvious success was of Common Terns with 15 nests on Tern Island although not all raised broods as a number of nests were deserted. Other notable breeding was of Mandarin, Barnacle Goose, Tufted Duck (several broods), Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail.

Autumn was generally very quiet with a small wader passage, the appearance of 3 Ruddy Ducks (remaining until November), single Firecrests and Brent Goose, the latter of which was only the second site record the first being in 1984. The year closed with duck numbers building and December records of Peregrine and Little Egret.

*Kevin Briggs* reports the unusual breeding success achieved by Mandarin ducks on the Reserve this year. Mandarin ducks normally lay 8-12 eggs and are single brooded. Fourteen or more eggs in a clutch result from two females laying in the same nest, egg dumping!! The breeding Mandarin population has been increasing at Moor Green Lakes, using the nest boxes provided. On 19th April a female was taken from a clutch of 26 eggs, most likely to be the product of 3 females. On 26th May the same nest box contained 3 addled eggs, three dead chicks and 20 hatched shells. This success is most unusual and not recorded in any text Kevin has read. Moreover, on the same date clutches of 18, 8 and three clutches of 10 were found as well as two boxes each containing 2 Mandarin and 2 Stock Dove eggs. This would suggest a minimum of 10 females breeding. The most Kevin ever saw in one visit was seven!!

*Sue Proudley's* first impression of 2002 was that it had been a poor year for butterflies, but then she looked at her record sheets for Moor Green and found that the Speckled Wood had had a better year than for the previous





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two years. 27 were recorded in July and 30 plus in both August and September. The Speckled Wood is a familiar butterfly with brown wings, dappled with creamy spots, regularly seen patrolling the shady paths of the Reserve or perched on a sunny leaf. The adult is on the wing from April until October. Eggs are laid on blades of grass in successive broods throughout the summer. In the autumn some larvae pupate and remain as pupae until the spring. Others remain as larvae through the winter, sometimes feeding on coarse grasses, but mainly in a state of semi hibernation.

*Peter Scott* took on the role of Reptile Recorder at the beginning of the year and was largely instrumental in planning for the installation of the reptile hibernaculum on the north side of Colebrook North Lake in February. Peter says he has been happy to treat this year as a settling in period. He put down ten small sheets of corrugated iron on the Reserve as basking areas for reptiles. Grass snakes were found under or near three of these. Steve Farmer also reported seeing three adders on a large sandy pile of rotting weed near the Colebrook Hide scrape.

In mid-July *Delphine Hoyle* and her helpers conducted their annual survey of plants on the wildflower meadow on the north side of Colebrook North. Delphine thanks those who helped this year and says she is still looking for more people to help in this survey work, especially someone with specialist knowledge of grasses. This year teasels were reported growing on the Reserve for the first time.

During the summer *Martin Mitchell* surveyed the three bare banks on the north side of Colebrook North for solitary wasps and bees. These are the first such surveys undertaken on the Reserve. They showed that the bare banks are successful nesting sites for at least 8 different species of mining wasp and bee.

*Steve Farmer* reports that conservation work continued on the Reserve in the winter, spring and again in the autumn. The best attended Work Party was in February for the building of the reptile hibernaculum. Other major jobs were the completion of the scrub clearance work along the north side of Grove Lake and on Long Island. In the autumn birch saplings were cut down at the east end of Colebrook South to improve the flight path for the ducks and geese and bramble was cut down on the north side of Colebrook North. The final tasks of the year were devoted to laying a section of the hedge between the footpath and the bridleway leading down to the River Blackwater. We were very sorry to say goodbye to Amanda and Julian Simpson-Atkins in December before their move to a new life in Shropshire.

*Sheila Farmer* reports that the membership on 31 July (the end of the 2001/2002 year) was a record 429 being about 13% higher than the previous year. This year it is already up to nearly 400 which suggests that this will be another record year. This seems to be a happy note on which to end as we look forward to 2003, our Tenth Anniversary Year.

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## Moor Green Lakes Group – 10th Anniversary

*Katrina Slocombe*

In 2003 the Moor Green Lakes Group, in conjunction with RMC, will be celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the Group. RMC have asked the Group to provide a display to illustrate Moor Green "across the years". This could take the form of photographic displays of different aspects of our work and of the changes in vegetation and animals through the seasons and over the years. I should like to ask members if they would be willing to provide copies of their photographs for use in displays. In order to decide what to portray it would be useful if members could initially contact me (Katrina Slocombe) by phone (home 01276-35062) or email : [kslocombe@aqg.org.uk](mailto:kslocombe@aqg.org.uk) , with details of the types of photographs they have and would be willing to share.

These photographs could be:

Conservation volunteer work parties with:

-before-and-after (and hopefully during) shots of the site,





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- action shots of volunteers working,
- bonfires / coffee breaks / even Land Rovers stuck in the mud!! (with apologies to the Blackwater

Valley Countryside Service who so earnestly support us with personnel, equipment, and expertise!);  
Changes in the site across seasons / years;  
Surveying;  
Mammals / birds / fish / invertebrates;  
General habitat / vegetation changes;  
AGM (meetings / buffets);  
Anything else which you think may be appropriate to "*Moor Green through the Ages*"!

Naturally it would be very useful if we could have an indication of the date (year/season) the photographs were taken, although this is not essential, in order to give an idea of the changes that have taken place at Moor Green across the 10 years since the inception of Moor Green Lakes Group.

There is no need to send any photographs to me at the moment and I will be in contact in the New Year to discuss details so please give your contact details (including a phone number). We hope to maintain this display for use in the local community to promote the achievements and enthusiasm of Moor Green Lakes Group and its members, so your assistance will be much appreciated.

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## Theft and Vandalism at Moor Green Lakes

*Ken Crick*

It is worrying to report that the Colebrook Hide was vandalised again this summer. Entry was attempted by completely destroying one of the viewing port hatches and damaging its frame. Having failed to gain entry in this manner the vandals then attacked the larger wheelchair viewing port hatch and by this means did gain entry. Repairs were put in hand immediately the break-in was reported, which was just as well as the next day it rained heavily soaking the inside of the hide. Even more disturbing was the fact that when the repair team approached the Hide with the newly manufactured cover up to six youths were seen to run from the Hide across the Reserve. All the hatches were open but the door was still locked. There was another act of vandalism on New Year's Day 2003 when someone tried to jimmy the Colebrook Hide door open. Fortunately this was not successful. Please help us by making sure that the door is properly locked and that all the viewing ports are closed and secure when you leave one of the Hides. If you see any suspicious activity please report it immediately to one of the Committee members.

Theft from cars parked in the Lower Sandhurst Road car park continues to be a problem. I am keeping a register of thefts to use as evidence in my attempts to persuade RMC Aggregates to fund a locked compound for members' cars, similar to those provided for the fishing fraternity in the Blackwater Valley. If you have suffered from car theft at Moor Green please let me know so that I can include the details in the register.

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## Parting of the ways

*Ken Crick*

Those of you who help out on the conservation work parties will know that Amanda and Julian Simpson-Atkins have lead the work parties at Moor Green for the last seven years. For five years Amanda worked for the Blackwater Valley Countryside Service and for the last two years, since her return to teaching, Amanda has continued to run the Sunday Work Parties in her spare time. Julian has been our contractor who has cut the viewing slots round the Reserve each winter. Their life is now taking them to Shropshire and they will be sorely missed here on the Hampshire and Berkshire borders. Our thanks for all their efforts on our behalf in the past and best wishes for the future go with them.







## Conservation Work Parties

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The dates of the conservation work parties to be held at Moor Green Lakes during January to March 2003 are as follows:-

Sunday 12 January  
Tuesday 21 January  
Sunday 9 February  
Sunday 9 March  
Tuesday 18 March.

The main emphasis of the programme during this period will be island clearance work provided that the weather is suitable on these dates. The shingle covered islands (Tern, Plover and Sandpiper) all require the removal of last year's growth of annuals such as willowherb. Snipe Island, favoured by the swans as a nesting site, requires a limited amount of scrub clearance. It is several years since any scrub clearance work was done on Grove Island. Finally there is a large area on Long Island which still requires attention in the on-going programme to clear an eighth of this island each winter.

The meeting place for all these work parties is the Moor Green Car Park on Lower Sandhurst Road at 10:30am. Please bring suitable outdoor clothing and footwear and a packed lunch if you intend to stay for the whole day. Tea and coffee will be provided. All are welcome to attend. If you would like to find out more please contact Steve Farmer (01252 409868) or Sue Dent and Adrian Douglas (BVCS) at Ash Lock (01252 331353).

## Innocence regained

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*Bette and Gordon Harland*

It was one of childhood's mysteries that the nature programmes on the radio such as "Out with Romany" described a countryside filled with wild animal and bird activity while our walks found very little. Romany had only to go to a stream to find all manner of fauna interacting with each other, undisturbed by his presence. What little we saw was mostly startled rabbits or hares, who would straightaway bolt for cover. Later on television programmes showed the same sort of experiences as Romany had enjoyed but illustrated by film. The countryside looked like the countryside where we walked but was teeming with wildlife acting out their full life cycle. Eventually came the suspicion that programme producers and editors could combine a series of separate events observed in several places and over a long time to construct the short fauna rich narratives that filled their programmes.

This led to some cynicism about the published or broadcast accounts of nature. The cynicism was confirmed by some 25 adult years of dog walking around Yateley. During that period we saw rabbits occasionally, a fox about ten times and put up a deer once. The area was rich in birds but they were generally wary of us and certainly did not do much more than watch us suspiciously and make alarm cries. Real life was never as exciting on a weekend afternoon as the radio and television programmes had implied.

This year, with the dogs too old, and one of the humans too frail for long walks we exercised by taking short strolls. These were mainly along stretches of the Blackwater within about half a mile from a car park. A new Ordnance Survey map was purchased to replace a twenty year-old edition and from this we discovered the car park on Lower Sandhurst Road.

Our first visit was on a weekday in June. We disturbed a family of green woodpeckers as we drove into the car park and there was a range of small birds in the bushes around the car park and along the path leading towards the Blackwater. Past the hedge at the north end of the lake we could see terns on and around the small central





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island. We walked on to get a closer view and found the Colebrook hide with its public viewing area. Peering through the fence we saw that the terns had young on the ground on the island and most of them were busy fishing and feeding the young but some were perching on the wire fence or just sailing on the lake. The view was excellent and we were confident that we would be able to identify the type of tern when we got back home to our bird book.

A few minutes after arriving, along the scrape from our right came a downy chick, which was pecking at some small things on the ground. There were two adult lapwings escorting it, one about two yards in front and the other immediately behind: they were not feeding but watching. Barely had we got our binoculars focused on this family group when the parents flew fast and low, screaming as loud as they could, to our left: a fox had emerged at the lake edge where a fence comes down to the water. The lapwings mobbed the fox flying low and loud close to its head. The fox stopped for a few seconds, looked around and then decided to retreat when six Canada geese arrived to join the lapwings.

The lapwings soon returned to their chick but the geese, who were now very excited, gathered on the point of land, shouting at each other. This noise attracted the attention of a swan, which emerged round the hide from the south end of the lake. With the fox absent it decided that the geese were the cause of the upset and began to display at the geese. The geese were now frantic to get into the lake, perhaps they remembered that there was a fox nearby, but the swan was determined that they should not. It cruised up and down a couple of yards away from the geese. Each time a goose tried to slip into the lake behind it the swan would turn very quickly and drive the goose back to shore. This lasted for about ten minutes by which time the swan had drifted about ten yards out into the lake but was still patrolling up and down. While the swan was moving towards the southern end of its beat, the bravest goose entered the water and paddled briskly to the north. The swan turned and seemed to think about chasing it but gave up almost immediately. On the swan's next patrol to the south the remaining five geese got into the water and fled after their leader. The swan decided that peace was satisfactorily restored and paddled off, out of our view behind the hut.

This seemed a good moment to go for our tea and we walked up the path towards the car park. About half way along we saw another fox running along the garden fence of the farm towards the path. It disappeared into the bushes near the edge of the path and we could not tell whether it had crossed the track or not. We looked round when we were near but could see no sign of it. We had one last look across the lake and saw three deer in the water grazing from the overhanging bushes on the south side.

We realised when we got back to the car that all this action had lasted for about half an hour, just about the right length for a television nature programme for children. It made us think. Perhaps Romany really did experience the events that he claimed. Perhaps, for all our lives, we had not been visiting the right places!

We had liberated a leaflet and applied for membership of the reserve. Since then we have visited the hides on most days. We have not seen quite so elaborate a saga again but we have seen many shorter incidents to remember and enjoy, including deer swimming in the Colebrook lake, kingfishers fishing and a kestrel that caught a small mammal on the hump at the scrape edge not 20 yards from the Grove hide – just the sort of things that Romany was always reporting!

*(Editor. Since Bette and Gordon submitted this article to be included in the Newsletter they report that they have seen three Black Swans on one day and a Little Egret on another day!)*

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## House Sparrow survey by Rushmoor Wildlife Group

*Kevin Briggs*

The once abundant House Sparrow has declined by 67% since 1970. There is now considerable conservation interest to reverse this trend. Rushmoor Borough Council has undertaken the monitoring of this species.





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Repeatable, representative and reliable data counts are needed from all areas of the Borough. The newly formed Rushmoor Wildlife Group has undertaken the task with a proposed two level survey:-

- (1) for selected one km squares in the Borough a twice-yearly survey of male House Sparrows on two 1000m routes taken through the square.
- (2) survey a 200m length of road adjacent to the observer's home twice each year for House Sparrows. One or more lengths could be added.

In each case the first survey would occur between mid March and late April and the second between mid May and late June. The total number of birds seen is the required data. Some simple habitat information (e.g. age of housing, size of gardens, number of trees per 200m length) would increase the value of the count. The 1 km square survey would take 1 or 2 hours and the 200 m survey 5 to 10 minutes. If 50 individual 200 m counts could be made each year then a reliable and robust index of population could be produced. It would also be possible to add other species. Ideally a network of surveyors could be built up in the Borough. Counts from outside the Borough are also of value.

If you are interested in taking part then please contact Kevin Briggs, telephone 01252 519881 or e-mail [kbbiggs@yahoo.com](mailto:kbbiggs@yahoo.com) for further information.

## Bat rabies

*Steve Bailey*

The death of a conservation worker in Scotland from rabies has recently (November 2002) been reported in the national press. He was infected with European Bat Lyssavirus (EBL) after being bitten by a bat. This disease invariably proves fatal if untreated. However pre-exposure vaccination and prompt post exposure treatments are 100% effective. It is also extremely rare for humans to contract rabies from exposure to EBL and there have only been four cases in Europe since 1970. Only 2 out of 3000 bats tested in the UK in the last 15 years have been found to be carrying EBL and these were both Daubenton's bats. Daubenton's bats rarely roost in houses. EBL has never been recorded in pipistrelle bats which are by far the most common.

Bats depend heavily on buildings for roosting. However having bats in the roof carries no risk of rabies, particularly as the most common species have never been recorded as carrying EBL. Risk of exposure can be completely eliminated by not handling bats and thus avoiding being bitten or scratched. If it is necessary to remove a bat from a room, wear thick leather gloves, place a small box over the bat and slide a piece of thick cardboard underneath. Infected bats may show unnatural behaviour, including unprovoked aggression and biting. If the animal's behaviour seems abnormal then contact the UK bat helpline on **0845 130 0228**. Otherwise release the bat outdoors at dusk. Further advice is available from the helpline.

If a member of the public is bitten by a bat, he should wash the wound thoroughly and seek immediate medical attention. Post-exposure treatment is believed to be completely effective provided it is started without delay. Advice is available through the NHS Helpline on **0800 783 5066**.

Local contacts are as follows:-

Hampshire Bat Group 24 hour helpline on 02380 617551

Website <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/glio/index1.htm>

Surrey Bat Group helpline (sociable hours only) on 020 8398 9973

Website <http://www.surreybats.org.uk>

Berks & S.Bucks Bat Group helpline on 0118 959 0965

Website <http://www.berksbats.org.uk>

Local licensed bat workers are:- Paul Hope c/o Basingstoke Canal 01252 370073

Steve Bailey c/o Blackwater Valley Countryside Service 01252 331353

