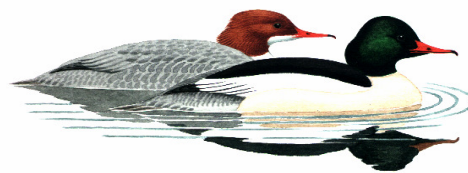


MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER

JULY 2003



Tenth Anniversary and Open Day.

Peter Scott

As members will know from the notice distributed a couple of months ago, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Group's foundation. Two events in early June celebrated this event.

On Friday June 6th, the reserve owners, RMC Aggregates, hosted a luncheon in a marquee erected for the day on the 'meadow' next to Colebrook hide. Guests included several local councillors, RMC staff, Moor Green Group committee members and many of those who have been most active in maintenance and survey work. The Guest of Honour was Mrs Kit Oliver, until recently responsible for the interface between development and conservation at the South East Development Agency. Mrs Oliver offered encouragement to the Group, stressing the importance of collaboration between industry and the voluntary sector that we exemplify.

RMC presented the Group with a commemorative seat as a token of their regard for our work. This will be installed beside the riverside footpath at the point 'between' Grove Lake and Colebrook Lake South. They also presented each of our regular workers with a rather smart sweat-shirt bearing the Moor Green motif.

The event was very enjoyable, not only for the lunch itself and the formal good wishes expressed to our Group, but also for the opportunity to chat to others interested in wildlife conservation. Unfortunately our intention to show interested guests around the reserve was undermined by rain in the early afternoon.

The following day, which we had designated as our Open Day to fit in with RMC's advertised tours of their quarry workings at Manor Farm, was dry and sunny. We manned both hides on a shift system from 10am to 4pm. Although, as expected, visitor numbers were low, those who volunteered (to whom we are very grateful) felt that sitting quietly in a viewing hide was, in any case, a pleasant way to pass a fine Saturday.

A dip in the water.

Ken Crick

The normal flying season for most adult Dragonflies and Damselflies is from May to September. For some years now I have attempted to extend the Dragonfly season by sampling the water's edge at Moor Green with a net, in search of Dragonfly and Damselfly nymphs. The net does not discriminate and whatever is present ends up in the sample dish.

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This spring I explored the rust coloured ditch on the northern boundary of Grove Lake. This was a filthy job revealing only Fresh Water Shrimps *Gammaridae* and Alder fly larvae *Sialidae*. Adult Alder flies eat small amounts of flower pollen, while the larvae are predators. Failing to find much

of interest I moved on to the lake itself where a surprising number of Water Stick Insects *Ranatra linearis* were encountered, four in one net. Other species present included various Leeches, Caddis fly larvae, Water Measure *Hydrometridae*, Pond Skaters, Backswimmers, and Water Boatmen. Mayfly nymphs that appeared to be Pond Olives *Cloen dipterum* were also found in good numbers. The nymphs of this species are reported to go through 24 moults before reaching adulthood.

The freshwater snails this year seem to have particularly thin shells, which may reflect the fact that the acidity levels in the water have risen recently, when compared with the pH levels reported on for 2001.

The steeply banked cut between Grove Lake and Colebrook Lake South had always looked promising with its stony bottom. As my shadow fell across the cut there was a commotion in the water and four Pike *Esox lucius* were seen to be spawning, each brushing against one another and intertwining. They varied in length from 15 to 18 inches and were fully aware of my presence. They continued with their romp for as long as I was prepared to stand and watch. The net has also produced several small Tench *Tinca tinca* and Perch *Perca fluviatilis*. Strings of Toad spawn were again seen in the waters of Colebrook North, where the water was so clear that the tadpoles could be seen swimming about, even on the bottom, and basking Pike were again clearly visible.

References. AIDGAP key to Freshwater Invertebrates.
Oxford Pocket Guide to Small Freshwater Creatures.

Survey of Fish in the Colebrook Lakes.

Viv Shears . (RMC - Angling)

A survey of the fish in the Colebrook Lakes, North and South , was conducted on 11 March 2003. The method of fish capture was by Electric Fishing. (7.5kVA. 350 volts at 18 - 20 amps). The number of fish captured is given in the table below. One small carp, which was also seen but not caught, has been included. No other species were seen whatsoever. All ages given are estimates from experience. All fish were returned to the lake once the operation was completed.

| Fish captured | | | |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Type of fish | Number of fish | Weight | Age |
| Tench | 10 | 2.5 to 4 kilos | (7 yrs +) |
| | 3 | 0.5 to 1.5 kilos | (4 yrs +) |
| | 14 | 50g to 150g | (2yrs +) |
| | 4 | <50g | (0+ yrs) |
| Pike | 3 | 2 to 4 kilos | (3yrs +) |
| | 26 | 50g to 200g | (0+ yr and 1 yr +) |
| Perch | 2 | 200 to 300g | (3 yrs +) |
| | 38 | 10 to 50g | (0 yrs + to 1 yr +) |
| Common Carp | 1 | 3 kilos | |

General Observations

Despite some evidence of prolific weed growth, the number of small fish present was lower than would be expected. No silver fish (Roach , Bream, Rudd) were present unexpectedly, but this may

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be due to the pH of the environment and the presence of the iron residues in the silt in various areas of the lake.

All the smaller individuals of each species were found in the lakes' margins and usually around any overhead cover (tree branches) or emergent weed growth (reedmace, etc). The number of 2 year + fish was very low suggesting that the level of predation is high, whether that be from avian (most likely from the presence of cormorants on the lakes) or piscian predators. Many of the sizeable fish that were captured displayed classic cormorant strike marks. One tench of about 1 kilo had 12 separate cormorant marks on it!

The numbers of small fish may, should it be wished, be enhanced by providing more suitable refuges around the lake edge in the deeper areas of water - submerged trees often provide sufficient cover for the species present in the lake. Much of the marginal area is too shallow to support fish populations. This may be rectified by planting common reed (*phragmites australis*) or similar plants.

Overall the fish population of the lake is very low with very few fish, of any species, that appear to reach maturation. Electric fishing in this type of water is usually successful for all species especially considering the shallow depths that average 1 to 2 m and do not exceed 3m.

Bird Watching for the Not Very Sharp-Eyed.

Moor Green Lakes, August to December .

Bette and Gordon Harland

The annual report last year told us that 201 bird species have been recorded in the area of the Moor Green site. Of course they are not all here at the same time and many of them are very occasional visitors. Nevertheless it is not unusual for experienced members to tour the site and record fifty or more species in a single visit. We are less ambitious than this and tend just to visit one or other of the hides either late morning or early afternoon. Usually we see between twenty and thirty species in an hour's visit. However when the one with poorer sight is let out on his own the tally drops to around fifteen species that are fairly easy to see. This article describes the 15 species we saw and recorded most frequently each month (between every other visit and on every visit) and at each hide from August to December 2002. It may help other visually challenged or perhaps beginning bird-watchers to anticipate what a visit in the next few months might reveal.

Fifteen species seen most frequently per month (by hide)

August

Colebrook: *Barnacle goose, Canada goose, Carrion crow, Coot, Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Grey heron, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pochard, Tufted duck, Wigeon and Woodpigeon.*

Grove: *Barnacle goose, Black headed gull, Canada goose, Coot, Great crested grebe, Green sandpiper, Grey heron, Lapwing, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pied wagtail, Tufted duck, Woodpigeon.*

The Wigeon at Colebrook were a small group in eclipse and would have been hard to identify at range but fortunately stayed on or close to the scrape on the right of the hide. The Green sandpiper at Grove would often forage at the lake edge immediately in front of the hide and was easily identifiable by its white shoulder marking and the white rump that showed when it flew.



September

Colebrook: *Barnacle goose, Canada goose, Carrion crow, Coot, Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Grey heron, Hobby, Lapwing, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Tufted duck, Wigeon and Woodpigeon.*

Grove: *Coot, Cormorant, Great crested grebe, Green sandpiper, Grey heron, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pheasant, Teal, Tufted duck, Woodpigeon.*

This month at Colebrook, Hobby and Lapwing displaced Magpie and Pochard from the list. The Hobby was a juvenile that usually perched in the trees North and East of the lake when it was not hunting insects over the lake. It was here from 2 to 18 September.

At the Grove end of the site Cormorants, Kingfisher, Pheasant and Teal displaced Barnacle Goose, Black headed gull, Canada goose and Pied Wagtail from the most frequently seen list. Cormorants were usually seen perched on the buoys on Horseshoe Lake. The Kingfishers were present quite frequently throughout the late summer and autumn: in September we often saw them perched on the twigs or rails near the water in front of the Grove hide. A family of Pheasants had been raised along the river and at least one would show itself when we walked to the hide. The Teal tended to lurk near the edge of Grove Lake but the green scapular was unmistakable when the sunlight caught them.

October

Colebrook: *Black headed gull, Canada goose, Carrion crow, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Lapwing, Little grebe, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Teal, Tufted duck, Wigeon.*

Grove: *Black headed gull, Canada goose, Coot, Cormorant, Great crested grebe, Jay, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pied wagtail, Teal, Tufted duck, Wigeon, Woodpigeon.*

There was quite a lot of change this month; at Colebrook Barnacle goose, Grey heron, Hobby and Woodpigeon lost their places in the top 15 to Black headed gull, Cormorant, Little grebe and Teal; at Grove Black headed gull, Canada goose, Jay, Pied Wagtail and Wigeon displaced Green sandpiper, Grey Heron, Kingfisher, Lapwing and Pheasant. All the dropouts were still seen except for the Hobby, which should have migrated south with the Martins and Swallows. We saw our first Little grebe on Colebrook North at the end of September and one or two were seen quite frequently thereafter. We had seen Jays occasionally at both hides before this month but at Grove in October they seemed to give up their shy ways in their haste to collect and bury acorns for the winter. Wigeon numbers had been building throughout September and by October there were flocks of about 50 at both Colebrook North and Grove: with these numbers even the weak-sighted observer could not fail to see them.

November

Colebrook: *Black headed gull, Canada goose, Carrion crow, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Lapwing, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Shoveler, Teal, Tufted duck, Wigeon.*

Grove: *Blackbird, Canada goose, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Goldeneye, Great crested grebe, Grey heron, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pheasant, Tufted duck, Wigeon, Woodpigeon.*

We saw Shovelers at Colebrook on 19 October and they displaced Little grebe from our November top 15 – a small brown diving bird is always going to be harder to see than a large handsome dabbling drake. At Grove, Black headed gull, Jay, Pied wagtail and Teal were displaced by Blackbird, Gadwall, Goldeneye and Grey Heron. The woodland birds such as the Blackbird were becoming easier to see: there was less opportunity for concealment as the leaves came off the trees and they needed to forage almost continuously since there was less food than in summer and fewer daylight hours. We first noticed Goldeneye on 24 October and thereafter kept an eye out for them. They dive for a long time and like the Little grebe are easily missed but the Drake is very striking when he is on the surface.

December

Colebrook: *Black headed gull, Canada goose, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Great crested grebe, Lapwing, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Pochard, Shoveler, Teal, Tufted duck, Wigeon.*

Grove: *Blackbird, Coot, Cormorant, Gadwall, Goldeneye, Great crested grebe, Goosander, Grey heron, Kingfisher, Mallard, Moorhen, Mute swan, Tufted duck, Wigeon, Woodpigeon.*



At Colebrook, Pochard displaced Carrion crow from our top 15. We had seen Pochard sporadically at Colebrook since August but at the end of November a flock decided to stay and in December we counted up to 35 on one day. At Grove Goosander and Kingfisher replaced Canada goose and Pheasant from the most frequently seen list. We saw our first Goosander there in mid November and numbers grew steadily thereafter. They would fly in at dusk just before we left the hide. On our best day we counted 23 but more may have arrived after we left. A Kingfisher developed the habit of flying from the river in front of the hide

at about 3.00 pm every day. It did not perch and rarely fished the lake but just flew fast and straight along the shore parallel to the river and out of sight. It was only in view for a few seconds and the poorer-sighted watcher would probably have missed it without prompting from his sharp-eyed partner.

Building a personal list of species

If you had started building a personal list at Moor Green in August last year and had only recorded our fifteen most frequently seen birds at each hide and each month through to December you would have accumulated a list of 30 species, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. The Moor Green site has a good mix of habitats and is amazingly rich in species. You won't just see the most frequent fifteen when you visit. When you add in the less frequent species your list will quickly expand to a hundred or more – even the poor-sighted member of our duo claims a personal list of about a hundred from under a year's viewing at Moor Green. We cannot guarantee the Hobby but you should be able to see the rest of the 30 species and much more if you visit occasionally but regularly over the next five months.

Conservation Work Parties.

The first Conservation Work Party of the autumn will be held on Sunday 14 September. Subsequent Work Parties will usually be held on the second Sunday of the month. The first Work Party lead by the Blackwater Conservation Volunteers at Moor Green Lakes will be on Tuesday 23 September. The dates of future Work Parties have still to be confirmed. Please keep an eye open for posters at the car park and in the hides.

There is a continuing programme of BVCV Work Parties on Tuesdays elsewhere in the Blackwater Valley. Please phone Adrian Douglas or Sue Dent (BVCP, Ash Lock 01252 331353) if you are interested. Alternatively visit the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership website <http://www.blackwater-valley.org.uk/> and look under "volunteers" and "task programmes". The dates of all the Work Parties at Moor Green Lakes are included in the Task Programme (both Sundays and Tuesdays).

Ken Crick resigns as Chairman

Those who attended the Group's AGM in February will already know that Ken Crick, our chairman for the previous two years, resigned from this post because of the increasing pressure of family commitments. Peter Scott was elected to replace Ken and Robert Godden has taken over Peter's previous role of committee secretary.

We are very grateful to Ken for the work he has contributed as chairman. In particular, his production of an up-to-date Management Plan for the reserve is proving very useful in guiding our maintenance and survey activities. Ken is finalising a revision of this document, whereupon it should need little change until reviewed in five years' time.



We are not losing Ken's services altogether, as he will remain our Dragonfly recorder and also continues to survey the water quality in the lakes.

Mink at Moor Green Lakes.

Steve Farmer

Any report of a mink being seen on the Reserve is always a cause for concern. The most recent sighting was made on 7 July by Bette and Gordon Harland, who reported seeing a mink in the Colebrook Cut close to the entrance to the Colebrook Hide. Early on 10 May Robert, Libby and Nick Godden also saw a mink, at the south west corner of the Reserve between Moulsham Bridge and the path down to the river from Colebrook Hide. They reported seeing a fully grown specimen under the roots of an oak tree on the south bank of the river. In April Peter Scott saw a mink in Colebrook North Lake near the reptile hibernaculum. Last September Sue Proudley reported seeing a mink in the water by Grove Hide. While back in January 2001 a mink was discovered with a half eaten fish hiding under an upturned boat on Long Island by two conservation volunteers.

However mink are probably much more common in the area than these occasional sightings suggest. In early March this year Tony Fuller reported that 2 mink had been trapped and killed at Mill Farm on Mill Lane near Horseshoe Lake. He also reported that 22 mink had been caught there in the last 18 months!! They were often caught as a pair a few days apart. This suggest that there is an on-going problem as mink are ruthless hunters of birds, small mammals and fish. Fortunately the nesting terns we have on Tern Island are protected by the anti-mink fence erected during the winter of 2001/2002. However the worry remains that other ground nesting birds are still at risk.

If you see a mink on the Reserve please make sure to record it on the Mammal Recording Sheet in one of the hides so that we can keep track of this potential menace.

Adders at Colebrook Lake North.

Steve Farmer.

The morning of Monday 19 August 2002 was mostly cloudy, but warm and close. There had been a little rain overnight and there were a few brief sunny intervals. The air temperature was about 20C and the wind was very light and variable.

I visited Colebrook Lake North to check on the cattle on the Reserve. I also took a camera to photograph the extent of *Crassula Helmsii* on the Colebrook Hide scrape a year after we undertook extensive extraction of *Crassula Helmsii* by hand (in July 2001). It was rather difficult to get a suitable vantage point that would allow me to take the photograph, so I decided to climb on top of the large heap of decaying *Crassula Helmsii* at the North end of the scrape. This had been built in August 2001. It had left a large, silty pile of decaying weed with some fresh vegetation growing on it, but the top half was fairly dry.

As I climbed up I was surprised to find that there were two large adders entering a hole near the top of the heap. I was wearing wellington boots and therefore felt in no danger. The larger adder was very thick - probably 3cm diameter. (This may be because it had already partly contracted). The rear section that was still exposed was about 30cm long. It was fairly dark brown with a very well marked black zig-zag marking. It very slowly slid into the hole. The second adder was thinner. This also had about 30 cm of its tail exposed. It was also fairly dark brown with a well marked



black zig-zag marking. This adder also slowly slid into the same hole. It moved even more slowly than the first. I had a camera in my hand but was so surprised that I forgot to use it!

I then looked down at my feet and saw that there was a third smaller adder on the other side of the heap near my left foot. This was completely exposed, about 30 cm long and about 1-2 cm thick. This approached the toe of my left wellington with its tongue flickering in and out. It got within about 15 cm of my boot and then retreated and slowly entered another hole near the top of the heap on the North East side. This time I did have the presence of mind to take a photograph of the adder at my feet!

Prior to this there had only been one sighting of a single adder on the Reserve. I felt fully rewarded for my job as a cattle watcher! This year, on a fine warm Sunday afternoon in late June, Mike Clifford and his family saw an adder as they were walking down from the car park towards the hide and had just passed the horses' field. The adder wriggled very quickly across the path from right to left. They estimated the length as about 30 to 40cms when straightened out. It was dark olive-green with black zigzag markings. On 8 July I saw another adder and a grass snake (both at the same time!) at the north end of the Colebrook scrape. Keep your eyes open this summer and you never know what you might see!

Newsletter Editor.

Is there any Moor Green Lakes Group member who would like to take on the job of Newsletter Editor? This is not too demanding as there are only two newsletters produced per year. About 300 copies of the January edition are sent out by post together with the notification of the AGM in late January. The July edition is sent out by the Membership Secretary as members renew their memberships from August onwards.

The newsletter includes items of interest, which have more immediate impact than the articles in the Annual Report.. The editor has the discretion to include any short articles on wildlife on the Reserve or in the Blackwater Valley. There are also notes about conservation, security, etc

There are several members who have indicated that they would be willing to help with administration or committee work. This is an excellent opportunity to help in running the Group. If you are interested please let Peter Scott know (phone 01252 878205 or e-mail ppscott@aol.com) or Steve Farmer (phone 01252-409868 or e-mail stephen.farmer3@ntlworld.com)

Security.

Please continue to be vigilant about the security of the hides. Make sure that all ports are closed and secure and that the door is locked whenever you leave the hide. The hides represent our most valuable asset. Long light summer evenings give plenty of time for idle hands to cause mischief. Luckily we have suffered less vandalism for the last few months, but a wrecked car was dumped in the car park. Fortunately this was quickly removed. A section of fence at the entrance to the car park was also damaged and has since been repaired. Trespass and illegal fishing occurred on the west side of Colebrook South in May and June. There is no reason to drop our guard. If you are aware of any incident please let a member of the committee know immediately.

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New Dragonfly Book now available.

The new book "Blackwater Valley Dragonflies" by Ken Crick and Jim Bennett is now available. This guide describes all the 30 species of dragonfly and damsel fly which may be found in the

Blackwater Valley. Each species is illustrated with excellent colour photographs. There is also a map of the Blackwater Valley and a description of the best sites, which are accessible to the general public, for you to visit.

The guide can be purchased direct from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership by making out a cheque made payable to "Blackwater Valley" for £3 (includes p.& p.) and sending it to BVCP, Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, Aldershot, GU11 2PS together with your name and address. The guide will prove to be an invaluable aid whenever you are down at Moor Green Lakes during the summer.

Alien Invasion threatens wildlife!

Steve Farmer

It came as rather a surprise to pick up a leaflet entitled "Alien Invasion threatens wildlife!" when on holiday recently in the Lake District. It was issued by the Lake District National Park Authority. It quickly became apparent that this referred to our old enemy *Crassula Helmsii* or New Zealand pigmyweed. The main points were:-

- An alien plant (New Zealand pigmyweed - from New Zealand and Australia) is threatening the Lake District's wildlife.
- It's a tough invader, which can grow all year and out-compete our native plants.
- It grows rampantly on damp ground, lakeshores, in shallow and deep water.
- It's hard to kill and a 1cm piece can grow to dominate a wetland.
- It's already causing damage in Derwentwater, Coniston Water and Bassenthwaite Lake.

The rest of the leaflet gave advice to fishermen on how to avoid spreading the weed to unaffected sites.

So the Colebrook Lakes and Grove Lakes join their more august brothers as lakes which are under threat. In the summer of 2001 three work parties removed a large quantity of *Crassula Helmsii* from the scrape in front of Colebrook Hide by hand. The weed that was extracted was made into two large piles, which have since rotted down. However mechanical extraction is not favoured as every little bit that is left behind starts to re-grow. It is apparent from the current state of the Colebrook Hide scrape that we are almost back to square one.

Small patches of *Crassula Helmsii* which were growing on the bund of the Grove scrape were covered with carpet in January 2002. This method can be used to kill the weed over a limited area if all daylight is excluded. When the carpet was removed in April 2003 it was clear that this had been successful. However it was also apparent that quite a lot of new patches of *Crassula Helmsii* had become established on other parts of the scrape. On 3 June about 70 square metres of the scrape were sprayed with herbicide. The herbicide which was used is only suitable for use on the margins of the lakes and not in open water. A month after spraying (early July) it looks as though this first attempt at spraying has made a substantial impact, but we will still have to see whether it has completely eradicated the weed. A second spraying may be necessary. Unfortunately recontamination of the site by birds is possible. Canada geese goslings have been observed avidly consuming the fresh green shoots of *Crassula Helmsii* on the Colebrook hide scrape. It seems quite likely that they will spread the weed, either on their feet or perhaps even in their faeces

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