

MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER



January 2009

Dear Members

Your committee wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year! If, like my family, you have been suffering from a bout of the 'flu' that has packed a punch like no other I can recall, no doubt the prospect of some glimpses of spring weather in a few weeks is something to cheer you! In the meantime, our reserve has its usual array of winter treats to enjoy, not least the Goosanders and Siskins, so on a sunny day get those coats and hats on and enjoy Moor Green Lakes!

Thinking of warmer days reminds me of a request from Sue Proudley, our butterfly recorder. Sue is going to be away quite a bit this year and needs some help from April through to September with some butterfly recording. Although I'm not an expert I have done some simple recording of butterflies on my BTO Breeding Bird Survey sites in Berkshire and I suspect it's not especially demanding so would be a very pleasant way to spend few hours in summer when birds are quiet, so, if you would like to help, please contact Sue on 01252 875536 for more information.

As always I remind members of our need for volunteers for all sorts of things. The fact is that just paying a few pounds a year for membership alone is not enough to make the Group succeed. Without a few selfless individuals a lot of voluntary groups would fail and ours is no exception. The small committee involved actually enjoy what they do and know they are putting something back into their community. My job is not one that is universally popular but I find it takes little more than a few hours at the computer and a bit of cajoling to drag some items out of people on two occasions a year and it gives me the right to bang on about finding volunteers! Peter Scott, well known as Chairman of Moor Green Lakes Group, is soon to retire from his position so we'll be looking for a replacement. Undoubtedly this takes a bit longer than knocking up a couple of newsletters a year but it is also an interesting and more engaging role. If you think you might like to have a go at Chairman or any other role, contact me or Peter for details or wait for a more detailed 'job description' in the next Newsletter!

So, what else should I plug for this year? Well, how about sponsoring your favourite bird in the next Berkshire Bird Atlas? Or, maybe joining the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust which has just won its biggest grant yet for the benefit of wildlife? The other thing that springs to mind is to help me provide a future newsletter by sending me a short piece about your favourite 'wildlife species' whatever it is – see more about all these inside.

And when you've stopped volunteering and helping the Group let's hope you'll find plenty of time to enjoy the reserve in 2009 – we hope to see you there! The AGM (notice enclosed) is another chance to meet and learn more about your reserve and please come along.

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Feeding the birds at Moor Green Lakes

Bruce Archer



A couple of years ago I made some peanut feeders for birds, which are attached to the trunks of oak trees along the bridleway just down from the car park. A cunning design enables the feeders to be taken down with an extending pole so they can be refilled. After a few attempts, I managed to make feeders more-or-less Squirrel-proof; in the sense that Squirrels no longer destroy them – but they still feed from them. We try to keep the peanut feeders topped up all year, except for a spell in April and May when the Blue Tits and Great Tits should be collecting insects for their young. There is some evidence that baby tits can choke on peanut fragments.

In September 2006, a work party constructed a ground feeding station in the paddock next to Colebrook Hide from some salvaged paving slabs and wood. Seed placed on the slabs during the September to March period attracts good numbers

of finches and Reed Buntings as well as Pheasants, Crows, Jays, Mallard and inevitable Squirrels!

In the summer of 2008, I was contacted by John Hodson, a Moor Green Lakes Group member, who was keen to get involved in helping to feed the birds at Moor Green – and has now taken over the challenging task of keeping the feeders going. He has also donated the impressive array of additional feeders on and around the ground feeder. The improvements are clearly welcomed by the birds and, I expect, most of the visitors enjoy the spectacle.



We are planning to use some of the Member's donations to provide a seat by the path which will provide a place to rest and watch the activity on the feeding station. We hope you enjoy this feature. Ideas are always welcome from members for other wildlife friendly changes and offers like John's will rarely be refused!



Staff changes at CEMEX

Derek Wiseman, regional manager at CEMEX, retired at the end of July. Derek will be well-known to many group members, as he has been associated with Moor Green since well before the site was restored as a nature reserve and is a regular visitor to the AGM. He has been replaced by Andy Scott. Andy also knows the site well, having worked in the region for some time.

We must also say farewell to Adrian Ellis, who was made redundant at the end of 2008, a casualty of the economic downturn that is affecting CEMEX. Although Adrian's role was mainly within the company's angling interests, he is knowledgeable about wildlife and made considerable input to the maintenance of Moor Green for many years.

We express the thanks of the Group to these colleagues and hope they will continue to come and enjoy the reserve in the future.

Manor Farm / Fleethill Farm

Peter Scott

The reeds planted in March seem to have 'taken' satisfactorily, despite the acidic conditions (pH typically below 3!) in the earmarked reed-bed area making their survival quite a struggle. Initially they did quite well, possibly due to bringing sufficient nutrients within their tissues from their 'source' locations. After planting, we raised the water level around them to ensure that they did not dry out. This seems to have been a mistake as, after their promising start, they soon began to wilt. In addition, those not protected by closely-spaced netting were grazed by geese. We then dropped the water level again. This seems to have helped enormously. [In reality there is little likelihood of them becoming too dry, as their roots can easily reach water which is very close to the soil surface]. New shoots have appeared on most clumps and even in 'open' ground between the clumps, indicating that their root systems are extending well. There even seems to be less grazing than earlier in the year.

We intend to plant more reeds next spring, again taking them from sources within the Moor Green reserve. It is clearly going to take a long time to create a really extensive reed bed. We hope that much of it will result from the natural spread of these small-scale plantings.

Part of the field in the north-east of the site, nearest to Moor Green, was ploughed and sown with a proprietary wild songbird seed mix. This should really have been done in May (or June at the latest), but poor weather and waterlogged ground prevented the contractor from doing the job until August. We decided to go ahead despite the low probability that much useful growth would result, as we already had the seed and it might have lost much of its viability by next year.

Restoration of those parts of Manor Farm that still resemble a bomb site will proceed once CEMEX can begin importing infill material. Just a narrow strip along the river will remain while sand and gravel are being carried from new diggings at Fleethill Farm. Activity in *that* area may not be all that great in the near future, because CEMEX (like all companies in or associated with the construction industry) is experiencing reduced demand for its products.

Group membership enquiries

If you have any problems with your membership please contact our Membership secretary, David Bishop 01252 876966 or email dave.bishop@mglg.org.uk. We apologise to members who encountered difficulties last year when the previous Membership Secretary had to resign as he was unable to keep up with the task. Hopefully, Dave has now got us fully back on track.



Moor Green Lakes Group Finances

Bruce Archer - Treasurer

The Group financial year ending on the 31st August 2008 has been another positive year. Income from Members was £1,564 in membership fees and a generous £1,199 of donations -Thank you. £1,726 was spent on running the Group; leaving a surplus of £1,118, including interest.

Projects undertaken during the year include: construction of four Mink rafts to enable trapping on the lakes, the use of rare breed cattle to improve grazing of the Reserve margins, purchase of seed to be sown on Honey Field which is part of the restored Manor Farm site west of the Reserve, and £175 on bird food.

In addition, we are grateful for SC Johnson providing materials and their staff who constructed the viewing screen on Colebrook Lake South as part of a "Community Day" on 6th June 2008.

We anticipate that when restoration of the Manor Farm site progresses over the next few years the Group will seek funding for hides and other facilities to provide access beyond the planned footpaths which are part of the restoration. The current Group Reserves stand at about £5,000, so additional sources and grants will need to be sought.

Thanks to Dave Pilkington for auditing our accounts once again.

Improving the Blackwater Valley



Moor Green Lakes sits about two-thirds of the way along the River Blackwater, which rises at Rowhill Nature Reserve near Aldershot before passing through Badshot Lea, Aldershot, Farnborough, Frimley and Sandhurst on its way past Moor Green to where it meets the River Loddon near Swallowfield. The valley has a good spread of wildlife interest all along it and most can be enjoyed by following the 23 mile path that runs from end to end. There is an annual 'Walk the Path' event in May, enjoyed by many, which offers two days of good walking to complete the whole path!

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust (BVCT) has been established with similar interests to the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership which are to open up and enhance the valley for recreation and wildlife. The Trust has made a number of applications for grant aid to carry out projects to help improve habitats and in 2008 it won its biggest grant yet from the Aggregate Sustainability Levy Fund (ASLF). This fund offers grants intermittently and it is important to be quick off the mark once the funds are released.

Administered by Natural England the grant fund has a multitude of objectives but the primary requirement is that the funds must be used to offset the effects of gravel (aggregate) extraction. Our valley is, of course, full of gravel extraction sites, so this should be a prime source of funds for projects. The recent application for funds by BVCT was to improve former gravel pit areas in Frimley, mainly known as Frimley Hatches, all of which is adjacent to 'the path' where it runs parallel to the A331 Blackwater Valley Road.



Several elements of the project exist. These include provision of a bench to enable walkers to rest and enjoy Frimley Bridge Lake from a closer perspective and some ground clearance and clearance of posts and netting to improve the views. Inside the CEMEX angling area where the best birdlife is found, the island will be cleared to try and encourage higher numbers of Common Terns and possibly waders in spring.



Here, the meadows have been completely dominated by scrub over the twenty years since reinstatement so a large amount of mechanical equipment is being used to open up the views and reduce the overgrown areas to grassland that can be easily maintained in the future.

These areas of grassland already hold good insect populations and it is expected that the numbers will increase materially. Dragonflies and damselflies are already well established and again the open areas will be attractive to them. No survey of the plants has been undertaken but again we

expect this work to have a positive impact. The grassland is currently used by Wigeon in winter for grazing during the night and by increasing the cut meadow area we hope to attract more of these beautiful birds.

There are opportunities for people to help with surveys at Frimley so if you would like to see the work and consider doing a plant survey or even dragonflies and damselflies you would be welcome, just contact the Editor.

The Trust's strength in making bids is its membership and track record. The latter is now growing while the former is rather static. Bearing in mind we have probably approaching one third of a million people living in the Blackwater Valley, a membership below one hundred shows a disappointing response from the public, or perhaps we have not managed to promote ourselves well enough! Annual membership is just £5 and includes the whole family living at one address. The subscriptions attract Gift Aid and the accumulation of these enables the trust to find the normally obligatory share of project costs that has to be raised by voluntary efforts. You can help by joining which is very easy – contact the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership at Ash Lock Cottage, Aldershot on 01252 331353 for a leaflet and details or ask the Editor.

Berkshire Moth Group Visit Moor Green Lakes

Moth Recorder - Colin Proudley

On 29th August 2008, 7 fellow moth enthusiasts from the Berkshire Moth Group joined me at Moor Green Lakes Reserve. We ran 8 light traps from 7.30 that evening until 1am the next day. One very keen member stayed until 7am, sleeping in his camper van. Of the traps there were 6 Skinner traps, one light on a tripod over a white sheet and one top of the range Robinson trap.

The evening was perfect for mothing, warm, cloudy and only a light breeze. We ran two traps in the car park area, one under the oak trees on the north bank of Colebrook North, one on the path near the first entry gate. Two were located close to the bird feeding area and one near the hide. The last one was sited just over the bridge over the cut.



On collating all the catches we found we had caught a total of 1035 moths of 97 species, plus one speckled wood butterfly which stayed the night in and out of the Robinson trap. There were a few hornets about, but we were not bothered by them or any other stinging or biting insects. Perhaps the star moth of the night was the Webb's Wainscot *Archanara sparganii*, this is a nationally scarce species and is rare by anyone's standards.

This one night has added greatly to our knowledge of the moth fauna at Moor Green Lakes. All moth trappers enjoyed the evening and the moths were released back on site once identified. If you would like any more information about moths or would like to get involved with this fascinating interest please contact our Moth Recorder Colin Proudley on 01252 875536 who will be pleased to hear from you.

My Favourite Butterfly

Butterfly Recorder - Sue Proudley



I suppose I was first fascinated by butterflies as a child. My family lived in the end house of a row of just four, surrounded by open fields. My Grandparents lived next door. Our gardens were, by today's standards large, separated only by currant and gooseberry bushes. The other side was bordered by a substantial field hedge of elm, hawthorn, elder, bramble and dog rose. We kept chickens under the fruit trees at the bottom of our garden separated from the lawned area by a rustic trellis covered with roses. My Grandfather tended a large vegetable plot at the bottom of his garden while my grandmother delighted in her flower garden, inviting everyone to enjoy it with her. My favourite spot was an old bench under the buddleia bush by my grandparent's kitchen door. In the summer the buddleia was full of bees and butterflies. I used to think that my cousin had been tearing the wings on some of the butterflies and got very cross with him, but later I discovered that Commas are meant to have ragged wings.

The Comma gets its name from the white comma mark on its hindwing. The upperwings are orange with brown and black splodges, the ragged edges emphasised by a dark border. When the wings are closed the Comma looks like a dead leaf which helps the butterfly avoid predators when overwintering amongst the trees. In the spring the male establishes a territory in a sheltered sunny spot at the edge of a wooded area. The females lay their eggs singly on hop or nettle leaves. Elms were also chosen prior to Dutch elm disease. In the summer the *hutchinsoni* form of the Comma emerges. These butterflies are lighter and brighter in colour and have less well defined ragged edges. They are easily confused with Fritillaries in flight. Later emergences revert to the normal darker form which will overwinter before breeding.

Berkshire Bird Atlas 2007-11

The Berkshire Bird Atlas Group is a small group of volunteers who have taken the opportunity of the national BTO Bird Atlas project to seek to update and improve the previous and only Berkshire bird atlas published in 1996 which was based on fieldwork around 20 years ago. The team of five has already gratefully received the help of many county birdwatchers to undertake some of the fieldwork necessary over the four years of the project.

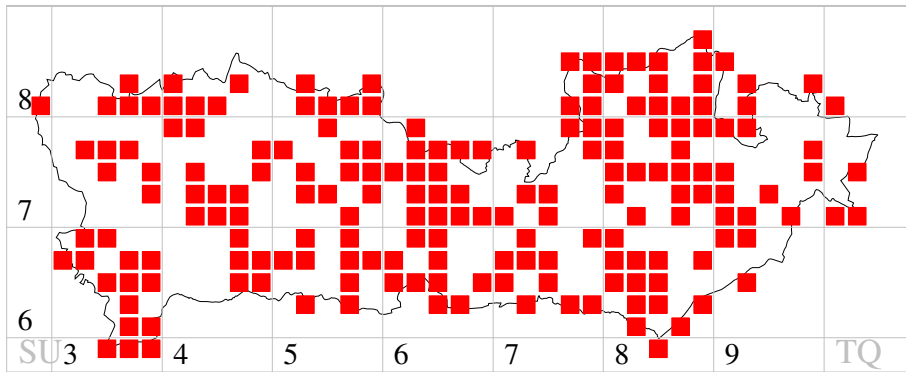
Progress has been excellent and the latest newsletter from Chris Robinson, our organiser, shows the position after two seasons. For those who aren't on the distribution list here's the broad picture.

www.mglg.org.uk

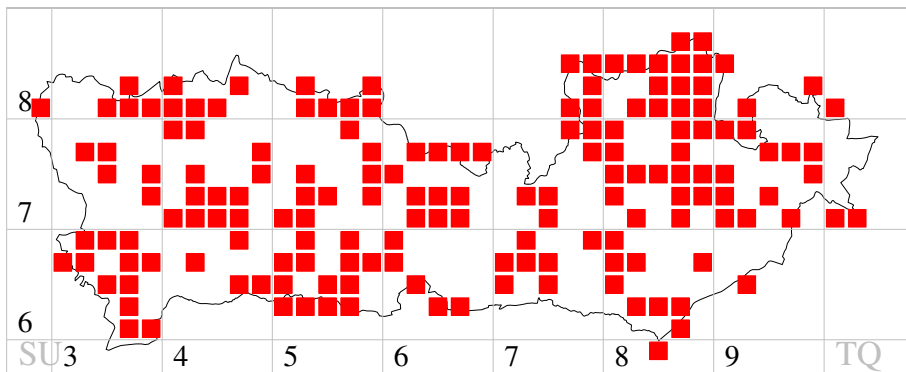
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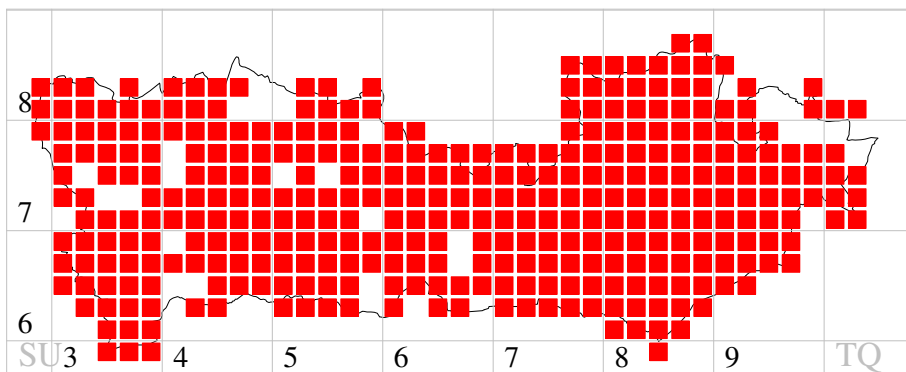
Map showing winter TTVs completed (184 = 47% of total):-



Map showing breeding TTVs completed (163 = 42% of total):-



MAP showing allocated TTVs (347 out of 391 = 89% assigned):-



Of course, the TTVs (Tetrad Timed Visits) are only part of the work that needs to be done – in fact they are probably the most challenging part! The remainder of the survey work is to find the birds not spotted on the TTVs! This can be a more rewarding type of birding, mainly because you don't have to set aside a full two hours and you can spend as long as you want in any habitat area. TTVs require full concentration for the two hours as every bird seen (except juveniles in Spring) needs to be counted. Roving needs no more than a short time in a tetrad to do a bit of birding and anything can be found and recorded. The value of the Atlas comes from the combination of the two types of surveying.



The BTO Atlas website is very impressive (see <http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/index.htm>). It gives snapshots of Atlas records across the country and a new facility allows you to get a bird list for any tetrad or 10km square in case you want to go and find the missing species! So, even when out of Berkshire there are useful survey activities to do. When previous atlases have been done this quality and quantity of data has never been available in such an immediate, interactive way.

As you would expect the publication of a book of this nature will be a costly affair. BBAG have estimated about £30,000 will be needed to provide the quality of publication we all expect today. This means a major funding task has been launched to make sure our county has an avifauna to be proud of. One initiative to raise funds which has proved successful is 'Sponsor a species'.

The idea is that anyone who wants us to succeed can 'sponsor a species' for as little as £20 with a maximum price of £50. Many supporters have been kind enough to add a donation to their sponsorship or to sponsor more than one species. Examples of the species available at the time of writing are below. By channelling our sponsorships via the Berkshire Ornithological Club we can gain the additional benefit of Gift Aid, so if you are a taxpayer you boost your sum by 25%! In return for sponsorship your name will be printed and you receive a 25% discount off the publication price of the book.

The following organisations have already supported the project by sponsoring species:

Moor Green Lakes Group – *Goosander*

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust – *Coot*

Berkshire Ornithological Club – *Tufted Duck*

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre – *Swift*

Theale Area Bird Conservation Group – *Little Ringed Plover*

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust - *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Reed Bunting, Linnet, Stonechat, Turtle Dove*

Almost eighty species have now been sponsored but we still have over 200 to go!

If you are interested in birds will you help us? All you have to do is check the internet to see what birds are available – see http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/sponsor_a_species.shtml or ask Brian Clews who can be contacted on brian.clews@btconnect.com or 01628 529297. Brian keeps the full list of available species. Here are a few tasters:

Avocet - £30

Mute Swan - £50

Black Tern - £20

Canada Goose - £20

Bullfinch - £50

Rook - £20

Chiffchaff - £20

Common Gull - £20

Common Tern - £30

Fieldfare - £30

Gadwall - £30

Garganey - £20

Water Rail - £30

And, if you can't find one in that list there's plenty more to choose from!

If you don't have any money how about a bit of enjoyable survey work? Visit places in Berkshire that appeal to you and tell the project what you have seen – it's as simple as that! Ask the Editor or Brian Clews for more information.

