

MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER



January 2010

Dear Members

Happy New Year to you all!

With this Newsletter should arrive an invitation to the AGM of the Group and this year Peter Scott our Chairman has decided to step down so this will be a chance for you to elect a new Chairman. The position is open to any member to apply and further details are included overleaf. If you don't fancy such an important sounding job we are sure we can find an alternative role if you would like to get involved. Of course the AGM is much more than a formal occasion and a guest speaker and some refreshments will add to the enjoyment of the evening so please come along.

One thing that often causes confusion even if people are aware of it, is the difference between the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust, again an explanation can be found in your Newsletter.

We usually provide an update on Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm but there is little to report since the last Newsletter. Our aim is to keep you all in touch as matters develop so keep reading your Newsletters and watching our website www.mglg.org.uk . In case you have not seen it yet the website is a mine of information about the Group and the reserve. One example is the monthly bird reports telling us exactly what has been recorded on the reserve month by month so, if you are not sure about a bird you saw there it may be worth checking to see if anyone else agrees with you!

For those of you visiting the reserve in December you may have noticed the work carried out by a volunteer work party under the supervision of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. This entailed scrub cutting in the northeast corner of Grove Lake and in front of Grove Hide. Additional work was done to remove a Willow in that area blocking part of the river path. If you might like a little gentle exercise ask for more information about work parties at the AGM, believe me, you will not be pressured into helping against your will! Other things have happened so read on for more information.

Best wishes to you all for 2010

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Chairman wanted

As he stated at the 2009 AGM last February, Peter Scott will be resigning the post of MGLG chairman at this year's AGM. We need somebody to take over this role.

The duties are not onerous:

- chair group committee meetings, held quarterly (currently on a Tuesday evening). [If the Chairman cannot attend, another committee member takes the chair];
- chair the Annual General Meeting, usually in February, and introduce the guest speaker;
- represent the group (with two other group members) on the steering committee, which meets twice a year. This committee plans and oversees the maintenance of the reserve and advises on restoration of the newer workings at Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm. In addition to MGLG members, it includes representatives of Cemex, the quarry company that owns the Moor Green site, and local authorities;
- write an introductory chapter for our annual report, and check it for obvious 'typos'.
- liaise with Cemex and others as required.

Because the steering committee meets during the daytime on a weekday, the role would probably be most suited to a retired member, though an employed member who was willing and able to take a couple of days off work would manage equally well.

Overall it is a very interesting role, as contact with the group's wildlife recorders and with interested outsiders gives insight into all aspects of the reserve's habitats and their management.

If you are interested to find out more, without committing yourself in any way, please contact Peter Scott: telephone 01252 878215, email ppscott@aol.com.

BVCP or BVCT? Does it matter? Yes it does!

BVCP is the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership which is a funded organization representing most of the local government bodies bordering the path. The staff of the Partnership, lead by Steve Bailey are professional experts in countryside management and have various resources at their disposal including machinery, equipment and tools which can help us develop Moor Green Lakes and other areas along the Blackwater Valley. Centrepiece of the valley is the 23 mile waymarked path and this and nature reserves or parks are the focus of various events during the year designed to encourage people to enjoy their local environment. As we all know council funded organizations are under financial pressure, can be temporary and they are restricted in various ways from applying for grants available to other bodies.

In light of this the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust (BVCT) was born. The Trust is the means by which funds can be raised to improve the path and the valley in perpetuity. Unlike the Partnership, which relies on council funding year after year, the trust is a volunteer organisation with a volunteer set of trustees formed with the clear objectives necessary to undertake fund raising and oversee projects to improve your environment in the Blackwater Valley. BVCP and BVCT work closely with each other and you would have seen from a previous newsletter that the Trust has been able to make an important contribution already to improving the bridlepath at Moor Green Lakes and has handled other projects and made useful grants in its short life.

To be strong the Trust needs members - the cost is only £5 a year for the whole family. It is a charity so gift aid can also be claimed. Please join and helping the valley to prosper. You can see more about the Trust, what it offers and how to join on their website www.bvct.org.uk your support will help it to grow and expand its activities in the long term for the benefit of all. A high number of members helps win grants so joining really works!



Moor Green Lakes Group Finances

Bruce Archer - Treasurer

The Group financial year ending on the 31st August 2009 has been another positive one. Income from Members was £1,550 in membership fees and a generous £1,574 of donations; including a £400 donation mentioned below. £2,095 was spent on running the Group; leaving a surplus of £1,053 including interest. It is anticipated that the Group surplus will contribute to the funding for future viewing hides and access facilities for the expanded reserve.

Projects undertaken during the year include: a seat, made of recycled plastic, has been installed by the bird feeding station; a jetty has been installed to improve access to Plover Island for the volunteer work party; seven Irish Moyle rare breed cattle were supplied to improve the grazing of the Reserve margins in autumn 2008; and £400 was spent on feeding birds throughout the year. The Group also provided the refreshments for the AGM in 2009, which has traditionally been funded by CEMEX. Postage costs have been reduced from £446 for the previous year to £277 this year by more use of email and making the Annual Reports and news letters available on the website – www.mglg.org.uk.

The new viewing screen on Grove Lake was constructed by employees of the software company Sage, helped by countryside students from Guildford College. Stuart Croft of BVCP supervised the project. The location was chosen to enable viewing of the NW corner of the eastern half of the lake, which was previously hidden from view. This screen was made possible by a generous donation of £400 by Alan Woods a long standing member of Moor Green Lakes Group. We greatly appreciate his generosity.



New Long Island Bridge

by Stuart Croft

The ditch on Long Island is now boasting a brand new bridge, constructed by volunteers at the start of December. Tony Elston led the project which used wooden posts and rails to bridge the 4m gap. The bridge not only makes it easiest to get volunteers and supplies to the south side of the island, but is also capable of supporting BVCP's quarter tonne ride-on-mower. This will allow us to tackle the scrub on the south side of the island to promote the meadow species.



What is happening to our Small Tortoiseshell Butterflies?

By Sue Proudley

A few years ago the buddleia bush in my garden was covered with Small Tortoiseshell butterflies, now there are Painted Ladies, but no Small Tortoiseshells. Butterfly Conservation reports that, since 1990 Small Tortoiseshell numbers have fallen by a massive 80% in South East England. They are currently working with the Department of Zoology at Oxford University to investigate the extent of the link between the Small Tortoiseshell mortality and the tiny *Sturma Bella* parasitic fly.

The *Sturma Bella* fly is common in Europe, but has only been recorded in this country for about 10 years. It lays eggs on the nettles that the Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars feed on. It is suspected that the caterpillars ingest the eggs as they feed. The eggs hatch and develop, eventually killing the caterpillar host as it pupates.

Butterflies are near the bottom of the food chain so run the risk of being eaten by mammals, birds, spiders or other insects from the moment the egg is laid. Another recently arrived predator is the Harlequin Ladybird.

Harlequin Ladybirds were introduced into North America, Holland and other European Countries, from Asia, to control aphids. They arrived in the U K in 2004 and have rapidly spread over the country. Some specimens are glossy black with red spots; others are reddish orange with black spots. There are over 100 pattern variations. Harlequins have voracious appetites and multiply prolifically so easily out-compete our native ladybirds for food. They feed on aphids, small insects, other ladybird eggs and larvae. Butterfly and moth eggs and caterpillars are also on the menu. I have witnessed a large number of harlequins, adults and larvae surrounding Peacock butterfly caterpillars feeding on nettles. In the winter large groups of Harlequins hibernate in houses and other buildings emerging in the spring ready to breed and eat again.

Small Tortoiseshell butterflies hibernate over winter as do other butterflies. They often choose to overwinter in buildings if they can gain entrance. Modern buildings are centrally heated and securely double glazed, so often are too warm and lack the dark nooks and crannies for butterflies. Gardens are smaller and space is precious so nettles are not tolerated, especially in the summer. It is likely that increased predation, climate changes, and loss of habitat have all contributed to the recent fall in fortune of the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly. But fortunes can change.....

