

MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER



January 2011

Dear Members

Well here we are in another year, following a very big surprise period of weather, with the deepest winter months still to come as I write this. It will be interesting to see how nature copes with the strange goings on! In my garden the oak and beech trees have still not shed all their leaves, I normally expect that to happen in November. Any interesting stories or pictures will be welcome for a future Newsletter so please send them to me.

Our AGM takes place on 3rd March so do come along. The meeting provides an informal opportunity to meet your Committee and also learn more about the Reserve and its future. A formal notice and invitation will be issued with this Newsletter. The Open day in summer was a success and we received many positive comments. The event is being repeated in September 2011 so make sure you come along. Iain Oldcorn mentions this in his 'chatterings' overleaf!

In almost every edition we ask for volunteers, this time it's something different! We need a person to check mink rafts! These need regular checking to see if any have been caught or made marks on the rafts. More details can be obtained from Sue Dent at BVCP on 01252 331353.

The superb annual report produced each year by your Committee is dependent on records submitted by members as well as surveys and dedicated time spent by recorders. The report is much enhanced by your records and the hide at Colebrook Lake provides places for all sightings to be listed. Please make sure you record your sightings there, they do not have to be made from the hide, a walk anywhere in the reserve area can provide useful data.

While spring weather may be far from our minds just now, that is the time most of us tend to venture out more. However, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust Photographic Competition has already started so, bearing in mind it's free to enter, go and see if you can find any wintry scenes and sunlight to catch with your camera. Anywhere in the Blackwater Valley area is valid so just use your imagination and enjoy finding delightful scenes you can share with others. More details are inside.

I take this opportunity to wish all our Members a very Happy New Year!

Colin Wilson, Editor

Blakeney, St Catherine's Road, Frimley Green, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 9NP
Tel 01252 837411, Email colin.wilson@mglg.org.uk

Membership enquiries should be addressed to our Membership Secretary:

Dave Bishop, email dave.bishop@mglg.org.uk or phone 01252 876966

www.mglg.org.uk

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Chairman's Chattering

By Iain Oldcorn

It's my teeth that are chattering in the cold - another difficult winter for hard pressed bird species. Let's hope for milder conditions in the New Year leading to a good breeding season.

Maintenance of the reserve goes on behind the scenes: Colebrook Lake North hide has new felting on the roof as well as an improved door lock, several stretches of fencing have been re-fettled and the once a month volunteer working parties on Tuesdays and Sundays have made inroads into this winter's programme. And what a good job has been made on trimming back the encroaching vegetation along the eastern edge of the car park. If you would like to join in on a working party do please contact a committee member or BVCP – we do need your help!

As advertised in the last Newsletter, on the morning of 5 Sept we held our first "Open Day". This allowed members and the general public access to parts of the reserve that are normally closed; about 100 visitors attended. As well as static displays by BVCP and MGLG we had arranged guided walks focused on birds, mammals & reptiles. There was also an opportunity to observe Tim Ball's Reading and Basingstoke Ringing team in action. We intend to repeat this event on 4 Sept 2011, so why not put this date into your diary now?

As well as meeting quarterly to organise the day to day running and recording of the reserve, members of your committee have also: attended meetings with the landowners CEMEX about the long term future of the reserve and of the adjacent Manor Farm and Fleethill sites; hosted a group from Farnham who are near the start of the path to managing their local site when its restoration is complete in about a year's time; contributed to Wokingham Borough Council's Open Space, Sport & Recreation Study; applied (unsuccessfully) for a Big Lottery Fund grant to help repair our reserve's fencing infrastructure. We are also seeking approval for a modest extension to the car park so as to cope better with peak usage.

We need a volunteer to take over from Ken Crick the important job of taking and analysing water samples; this is done four times a year from four points on the reserve. This needs somebody with a meticulous approach, possibly with a technical background in chemistry or biology. If you are interested please contact me via iain.oldcorn@mglg.org.uk

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust Events

The Trust offers an annual programme of events, great opportunities to visit new places and see new forms of wildlife.



In 2010 a bird identification workshop, a mammal trapping day and four bat walks were very popular. In summer, a dragonfly walk and a leisure walk in the valley attracted much interest. The fungus foray was superb finding 32 species in Shepherd Meadows. The Trust aims to have something for everyone in our programme and 2011 will be no exception. Examples are:

10 February – a wildfowl walk around lakes at Frimley showing the habitat work done by the trust starts at The Quays Public House, off Coleford Bridge Road, Mytchett, GU16 6DS at 10am.

7 April - Another 'Identifying birds workshop' covering many of the species in the Valley is at Blackwater and Hawley Leisure Centre, Hawley Green, GU17 9BW at 7.30pm.

Members can come to events for free (annual membership for the household is only £5), a suggested donation of £2 is requested from non members. More details about membership and events are on www.bvct.org.uk and you can reserve a place for any event simply by phoning 01252 331353.



MOOR GREEN BUTTERFLIES to watch out for in 2011

John and Rachel Westmacott

Amongst the first butterflies to appear at the beginning of the season are some belonging to the 'Pieridae', the family of the Whites. There are eleven or twelve of these on the British list of which five are regular at Moor Green, Large White, Small White, Brimstone, Orange-tip and Green-veined White, and one other, the Clouded Yellow, is occasional. The most handsome of these is the Brimstone, a large distinctly-shaped butterfly which awakens from hibernation early in the spring and flies throughout the season. It may be seen in almost any month of the year, though last year it was only recorded between April and July.



The male Brimstone is a lovely sulphurous yellow, with red spots in the centre of both upper and lower wings. The female is similar but paler, yet still easily distinguishable from the other whites by her shape. When at rest both sexes hold their wings together, looking for all the world like leaves. The Brimstone is one of our longest lived species. A maximum daily count of 13 was recorded last April, the record for the site being 29 in 2006.

To the casual observer one white can look very much like another, and they will often be lumped together as 'cabbage whites'. However one which cannot be confused is the distinctive Orange-tip, which as the name suggests is white with orange tips to its wings. This is a feature of the male and makes it quite unlike any other white that we might see. True, the female has black wing-tips which makes her similar to some other whites, but both sexes have a green camouflage pattern on the undersides of the hindwings, not unlike the camouflage with which the army conceals its vehicles and equipment when out in the field. When the wings are closed together this is very obvious on both sexes, but it also shows through when seen from above. The male Orange-tip will be seen patrolling the paths and hedgerows at Moor Green in spring and early summer feeding, and searching for the more secretive females amongst the vegetation. The main flight period is April to June, but a second brood may appear in the late summer, though none were recorded after June last year. The maximum daily count in April 2010 was 13, the record for the site is 45 in 2005.



A third early white is the Green-veined White, to September last year, with a maximum daily count of 25 in July, which was a record for the reserve. This is a small delicate looking white butterfly with a tracery of green veins on the underside of the wings. The upper wing pattern varies from almost pure white in the first brood to white with black markings in the second brood, and so it can be confused with the Small White, but the green veins and its rather weak fluttery flight distinguish the Green-veined. It is a butterfly which prefers a dampish habitat and so the lakes and river at Moor Green are ideal for it to flourish.



VOLUNTEERS HARD AT WORK

Stuart Croft, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership Ranger for MGL.

The volunteers have put in a bumper turnout since we resumed conservation tasks in September, with 138 man days of volunteering aimed at improving Moor Green Lakes. Their work has included; cutting the car park hedge, clearing Tern and Plover Islands, digging the Grove Scrape channel and cutting lakeside willow. The most comic moment came when the lure of mince pies on Plover Island (and an excitable ranger) was enough to tempt the hardy band across in an ice-breaking plastic boat!



Considerable efforts this year have gone into allowing us to continue to keep the cows, which are invaluable to reduce the amount of scrub and graze the vegetation down for ground-nesting birds. Our own trusty team of cow-lookers checked the cows most days to ensure they were healthy and not munching greener grass in Horseshoe Lakes car park....! Fencing has been repaired on several tasks to reduce the cow escapades, including on a day when 21 John Lewis partners joined the normal team in Colebrook North. Work party numbers have also

been boosted by 5th Formers from Wellington College and students from Merrist Wood studying countryside management.

Thanks to everyone's efforts from BVCP and the MGL Committee and Membership and we look forward to another great season.

Why not come along and join a Conservation Work Party?

There's still time to help keep Moor Green Lakes and yourself in great shape in 2011! Come along on any of the following dates:

Sunday 13th February

Tuesday 22nd February

Tuesday 1 March

Sunday 13th March

Meet in the car park off Lower Sandhurst Road at 10.30am

Don't worry if you haven't done conservation work before, all training and tools are provided.

- 🌿 *No special skills are needed*
- 🌿 *Tools and training are provided*
- 🌿 *Refreshments are provided but bring lunch if you are staying all day*
- 🌿 *Just wear outdoor clothing, boots or wellies and waterproofs*
- 🌿 *Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult*

For more details contact Stuart on 01252 331353



www.mglg.org.uk

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New Barn Owl Box

Jain Oldcorn

Some of you may remember that the week of 19 to 26 September 2010 was generally warm and bright.

Unfortunately, Thursday 23 Sept was chosen to install the magnificent barn box donated by Mr and Mrs Pearce, and it was cold, wet and miserable. Fortunately, the weather did not put off Bruce Archer and Les Thorn. I went along to hold the ladder.

Bruce had very carefully chosen the site and obtained the agreement of CEMEX for its installation. It needed to be well away from other local barn owl territories and preferably adjacent to good hunting ground. The box is positioned facing south in a stout oak on the Manor Farm site, about 40 metres north of the footpath running east west along the north bank of the Blackwater and some 150 metres west of the bridleway between Moor Green Lakes and Manor Farm and close to a "meadow". It can be observed best from the riverside path.

I don't know what the hardest part of the job was: helping to carry the gear to the chosen location, looking for dropped screws in the long grass or holding the ladder! However, Bruce and Les soon had everything under control and the box was duly installed complete with a layer of wood shavings as bedding.



I wonder how long it will be before some wise owl realises what a palatial home awaits it and its partner?

Moor Green Lakes Group Finances

Bruce Archer

The Group attracted 366 memberships in the last financial year (1st September 2009 to 31st August 2010). This provided membership fees of £1534 and a generous £1260 of donations were included with these.

The basic operating cost of the Group was £587, spent on room hire, stationery, copying, postage, training and the AGM. The Reserve costs were £302 for basic maintenance and insurance for work parties. CEMEX, who own the site and operate the quarry, generously provided refreshments for the AGM and reproduced the Annual Report.

Two improvements to the Reserve access were provided in the year: a public viewing screen was built for Grove Lake with a generous member's specific donation of £400 received at the end of last year. The other improvement was provision of a wooden bridge on Long Island, costing £218. This enables the motor mower to be used, saving a significant amount of volunteer manual effort. A further £443 of donations was spent on bird food for the year.

We ended the year with a surplus of £801; which is typical for the past few years.



On-line payments - <http://www.mglg.org.uk/Joining.htm>

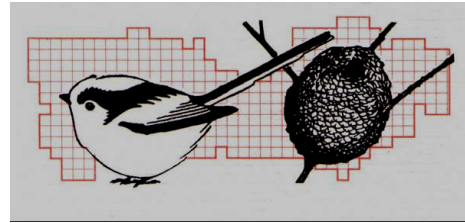
This year (2010-11) we have been able to accept on-line payments for memberships and donations. This involves using the facilities provided by your bank to make payments directly into the Moor Green Lakes Group's bank, the details of which are on the application and renewal forms available on our website - link above. This facility can also be used to set up an annual standing order which you can cancel online through your bank whenever you wish. 65 memberships were paid using on-line banking, which is 18% of the total memberships this year.

When making the payment, we request that you enter specified information in the payment reference field as described on the application form. If you were not a member in the previous year, or your contact details have changed, then you will need to email Dave Bishop, the Membership Secretary, with all the information requested on the application form.

In four cases this additional information sent in the bank's payment reference field was incomplete or missing, but since we also receive the name of the account holder, Dave was able to uniquely identify 3 of these cases as existing members. The 4th member made contact with Dave, so all 65 on-line memberships were dealt with and lots of cheques and trips to the bank were saved. Thank you to all who helped by using this method.

Berkshire Bird Atlas 2007/2011 – Please help

Many members of Moor Green Lakes love birds. The Berkshire Bird Atlas Group (BBAG) is now three of the four years through the fieldwork for their Atlas which will map birds across the county, summer and winter. Bird lovers, we need your help!



So far the results have been superb, but we have much more to do. It is almost certain that bird numbers overall have fallen and some species lost since the last Berkshire Atlas was published in 1986, but not all the news is bad, many new species have appeared. On 3rd March 2011 at Reading University (details at http://www.berksoc.org.uk/indoor_meetings.shtml), BBAG will be presenting some of the results of the work so far and explaining the project to members and guests of the Berkshire Ornithological Club. Everybody is welcome to come along, only a nominal charge applies to non members to help cover the meeting costs.

The meeting will explain the aims of the book, how the data is collected and why. It will advise how successful we have been with coverage so far and explain where we need to do more record collection in the County. The results will then be presented with species winners and losers explained and a comparison with national trends will be made. Overleaf you will see a brief progress report.

Finally, we will look at a number of species, how we gather breeding evidence, provide some advice on how to prove breeding and the species where the results need the greatest boost.

Surprisingly, some common garden birds are under-recorded. Surveyors covering areas away from their homes cannot easily peer into others gardens to see Blackbirds, Robins, Wrens, Dunnocks and Songs Thrushes carrying food for young or entering garden nests! House Sparrows carry food to hedges and roofs, Starlings do the same, even Jackdaws. Most of us see these birds in our gardens at breeding time, so you can help us by recording it and telling us. The date, species of bird, the location and the activity is all we need. Send them to colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk. We really need your help finding more breeding evidence for all species in this, our final survey year. See more via the link at the end of the next page.

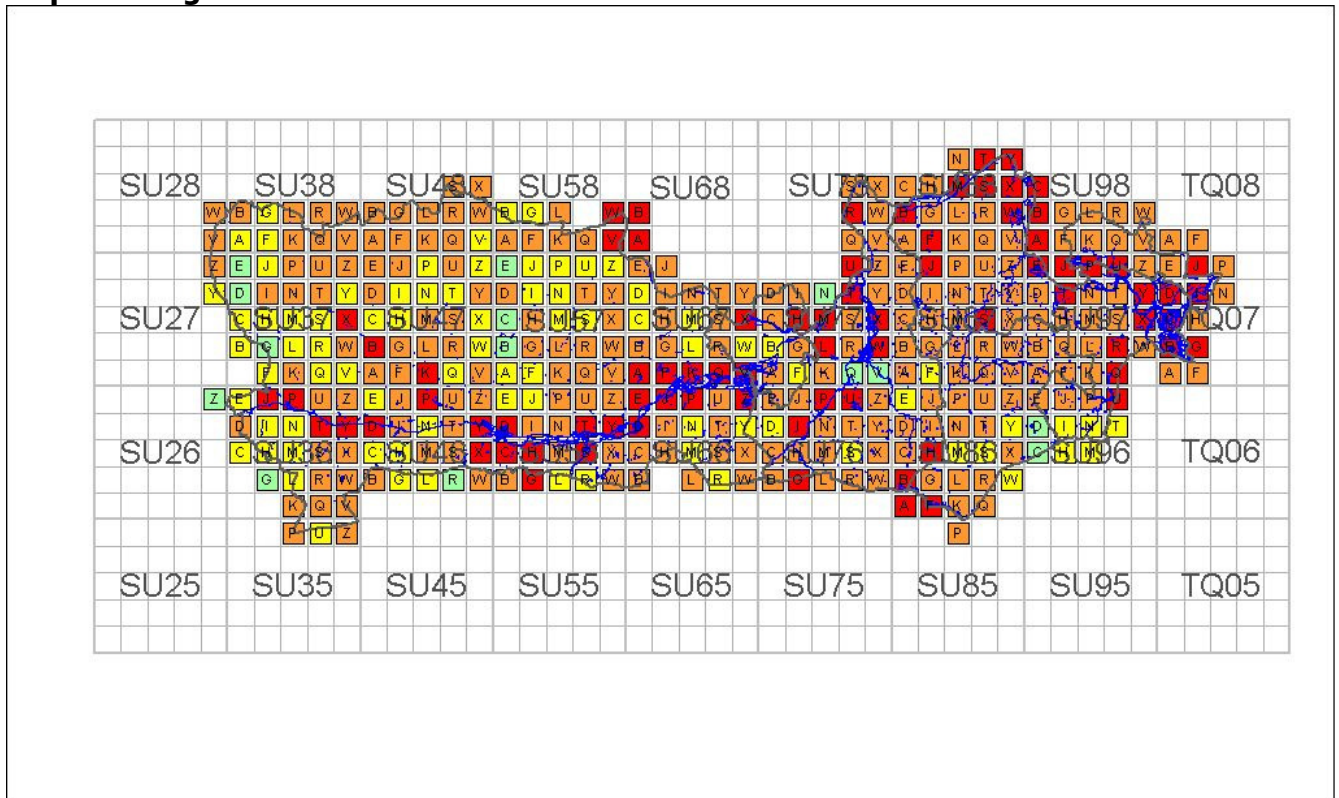


The Atlas Picture in Berkshire

We need to survey species in ALL our 394 tetrads (2km squares), firstly, with controlled timed recording visits (TTVs). To the end of last summer, 91% of all breeding season TTVs had been completed and before this 2010/11 winter started, 92% of the winter TTVs were also completed. This winter all TTVs are scheduled to be undertaken by nominated surveyors.

Now our main focus is on the most enjoyable form of surveying, 'roving' or 'casual' records. TTVs cannot find all species in a tetrad, it needs more flexible surveying to do that or just random recording of birds while out walking. That's where Moor Green Lakes members can help anywhere in Berkshire. We know not all species have been found in all places, some common species remain to be found.

Map showing winter 'richness' as of commencement of this new season



The colours show the number of species found so far in each tetrad: green 0-19; yellow 20-39; orange 40-59; red >60.

We believe 40-59 species should be easily achieved in most tetrads, and over 60 in areas where there are good water bodies. If you fancy a change in your birding location one day why not visit a green or yellow tetrad and list all you see? Owl records are particularly welcome, hooting Tawny Owls are excellent records for the Atlas. On the BTO web site (www.bto.org) there is a table in which you can search for a particular tetrad map and see just what species *have* been recorded and see what's missing. (From the BTO Home page, go to 'Surveys', 'Bird Atlases' and use the red bar to register). Even if you have not yet been involved in entering data to the Atlas, it is easy to register and add your findings to the 'add roving records' window.

For Berkshire read more at <http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/index.shtml> and you will find the maps at <http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/maps/atlas.html> fascinating, for both summer and winter. Any questions can be emailed to colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk .





PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2011



Do you carry your camera while out walking?

Then why not enter our first photography competition?

The Blackwater Valley has some fantastic views, so here's a chance to show us your favourites. In the valley there are rivers and streams, reedbeds and lakes, cottages and farms, bridges and weirs, meadows and fields and pubs and churches, they all offer opportunities to take stunning photographs. Take them in spring, summer or autumn, at sunrise, morning, daytime or evening, or at sunset. Opportunities abound so get on the Blackwater Valley path or visit the local sites along the valley and join in – it costs nothing and you may win!

There are two classes of entry – Young Photographer, and Adult.

The winner in each class will receive a framed and mounted copy of their winning entry and a book token. The two runners-up in each class will get a framed and mounted copy of their entry.

The competition is open now, and the winning entries will be judged at our AGM in November 2011.

You can enter up to 3 images, and entry is completely free.

View full details of our competition at:

<http://bvct.org.uk/sites/default/files/BVCT-Photographic-Competition/2011/photo-comp-2011.pdf>.

Then all you have to do is get out there and use your imagination!

