

MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER January 2013



Dear Members

Another New Year so what will this one bring? Eager birdwatchers will be starting new bird lists seeking the species with renewed enthusiasm and there'll be no better place to start than a walk around Moor Green Lakes. Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers have already turned up!! From lakes to islands to riverbank, woodland and meadow we have it all! Our chance to visit these habitats throughout the year is one of the great attractions of membership of the Group, especially when you can rest those weary legs in the hide at Colebrook or Grove and enjoy some relaxed and patient birding!

As always, I remind you of the opportunities to see more, by helping as a member of the Committee or just joining the occasional work party gives you the chance to explore behind the scenes and find out or assist how the management of the site is done. The reduction in hours available from the team at Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, reported in the last Newsletter, means we shall be doing more ourselves in future, but only if we have the help! Its not hard work, its only as hard as you want it to be so come along and meet a friendly group of people who like a bit of fresh air and gentle exercise. Our species recorders are always willing to enlist enthusiasts to help them so if you have a wish to expand knowledge of plants, butterflies, mammals or anything else let me know and I'll put you in touch.

Some of you may be aware of the exciting possibility of the RSPB moving into the area, we know they have been talking to CEMEX about the area's future so we may have a big new reserve right on the doorstep! We'll keep you in touch in future Newsletters.

I need to mention the website - <http://www.mglg.org.uk/>. This holds so much vital information for the Group but regrettably has been a major source of problems. It has now been fixed again but it will be some time before the more recent Newsletters and Annual Reports are added.

Finally, I wish to mention the AGM on 7th March. We are very privileged to have a speaker from the RSPB about 'Nature after Minerals'. This, of course is very relevant to our location in the Blackwater Valley where the landscape has been shaped over many years by mineral extraction. At Moor Green we have seen some of the better restoration results but no doubt we will learn how ideas continue to develop and may yet be seen by us where extraction is finishing close to Moor Green. A separate message about the AGM will provide further details of the evening.

Feedback about this publication and contributions from members are very welcome at the AGM or by email to the Editor.

Colin Wilson, Editor

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SOME OCCASIONAL BUTTERFLY VISITORS

By John and Rachel Westmacott

There is always great excitement amongst the birding fraternity when a rare or previously unrecorded bird drops in at Moor Green Lakes. Butterfly watchers get equally excited when an unexpected butterfly pops in. Over the past three years four previously unrecorded butterflies have passed through the reserve. It is worth keeping your eyes open during the summer months, as you never know what you might see!



In 2010 a **Silver-Washed Fritillary** was recorded along the river path south of the Manor Farm workings. This is one of several fritillaries found in this country, and is a big bold butterfly with mottled orange-brown markings and a distinctive wing-shape. In southern England it is usually found in broad-leaved woodland, and it flies from mid-June to early September. Its favourite food plant is the bramble, of which we have a good supply at Moor Green. The butterfly gets its name from the beautiful green and silver streaks on the underwings.

On the August Open Day in 2012 another fritillary flew through the reserve, a **Dark-Green Fritillary**. This is a powerful and fast-flying butterfly of flower-rich grassland and downs. It flies from early-June to early-September, and generally remains close to its breeding grounds. Usually seen in ones and twos, the male butterfly spends much of the day on the wing looking for hidden females, and the best time to see one at rest is early morning or late afternoon on purple flowers such as thistles or knapweed. The underwings are flushed with green and white spots.

The third of our four visitors, a **White Admiral**, appeared in 2011 along the path and bridle-way near the Sandhurst Road car park. This is another woodland butterfly which thrives in hot summers. It has dark brown upperwings with white markings, and very attractive orange and white markings on the underwings with dark spots. Flying between mid-June and the end of August, it spends much of its time in the canopy of oak and ash trees, but does come down to feed on bramble flowers, when it is most likely to be seen close-up. The female lays her eggs on honeysuckle. This butterfly has a powerful and agile flight, and is expanding its range.

Our fourth visitor, and one that created the most excitement, was a **Purple Emperor**, which was seen and photographed on 22 July 2012. This, the second largest resident butterfly after the Swallowtail, is a species which butterfly watchers will go far to see, and whilst it spends much time feeding on honeydew in the tree canopy like the White Admiral, opportunities do arise for good sightings. The male is a handsome black and white insect with an iridescent purple sheen on the upper wings which flash in the sunshine as the butterfly wheels about above the trees. The female's colouring is more subdued, and she spends much of her time searching out suitable places on sallow to lay her eggs. Often about mid-morning the male will fly down to puddles or dung to seek out salts, even resting on humans, and if you happen to see one it may well remain for several minutes before taking off again.



Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust – events for members and guests



The trust has a continuous programme of events aimed primarily at members but always welcoming visitors. The trust aims to improve the Blackwater Valley for people and wildlife and most of its events are about showing wildlife or different, interesting places in the Valley. It helps us if you book in advance, sometimes its essential! Details of the next few events are all available on the website www.bvct.org.uk but here's a taster:

NEST BOX MAKING

February sees us making nest boxes for people to use in their gardens. It's a good way to introduce children to the simple skills of banging in nails and understanding the life of common birds. Priced at £5 the sturdy boxes are a bargain, generally they are sold at a loss but the idea is to help the birds and get the children and people involved in wildlife gardening. So come along, yourself, children, grandchildren and make a box or two! The event is at Rowhill Nature Reserve Centre, Cranmore Lane, Aldershot, GU11 3BD (OS Map Ref SU849 499) on Saturday 9th February from 10 am to 1pm. Free entry, refreshments will be available.



BIRDWATCHING WALK

Near Badshot Lea is a superb nature area turning up many birds for local enthusiasts. The area was a working gravel pit and has been restored into an attractive mix of woodland and wetlands.

Our friend Richard Horton, a regular visitor to the site has kindly offered to introduce members and guests to what is currently know as Tice's Meadow. As a taster, 124 birds were recorded there in 2012 and at the time of writing recent records of birds include Barn Owl and Water Rail, Waxwings, 21 Snipe, Reed Bunting, Bullfinch and Lesser Redpoll to name but a few. Meet March 2nd, 10am at Pea Bridge, Badshot Lea Road, Badshot Lea, GU11 3RD (SU867 490). Bring binoculars (some will be available to borrow).

WALK THE PATH

This is a reduced version of the former annual event when over a weekend we have walked the whole Blackwater Valley path from Rowhill to Swallowfield. Following a change of resources at the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, the Trust has taken on the task of reviving this. This year we will walk the greenest part of the valley path from Sandhurst to the end at Swallowfield (passing Moor Green lakes on the way) on Sunday April 28th, a gentle walk of about ten miles. There will be refreshment stops, toilets and even vehicles to help those too weary on the way! This part of the path shows our local countryside at its best so why not sign up and enjoy a good social day's exercise? Put it in your diary and further details will be published soon on www.bvct.org.uk

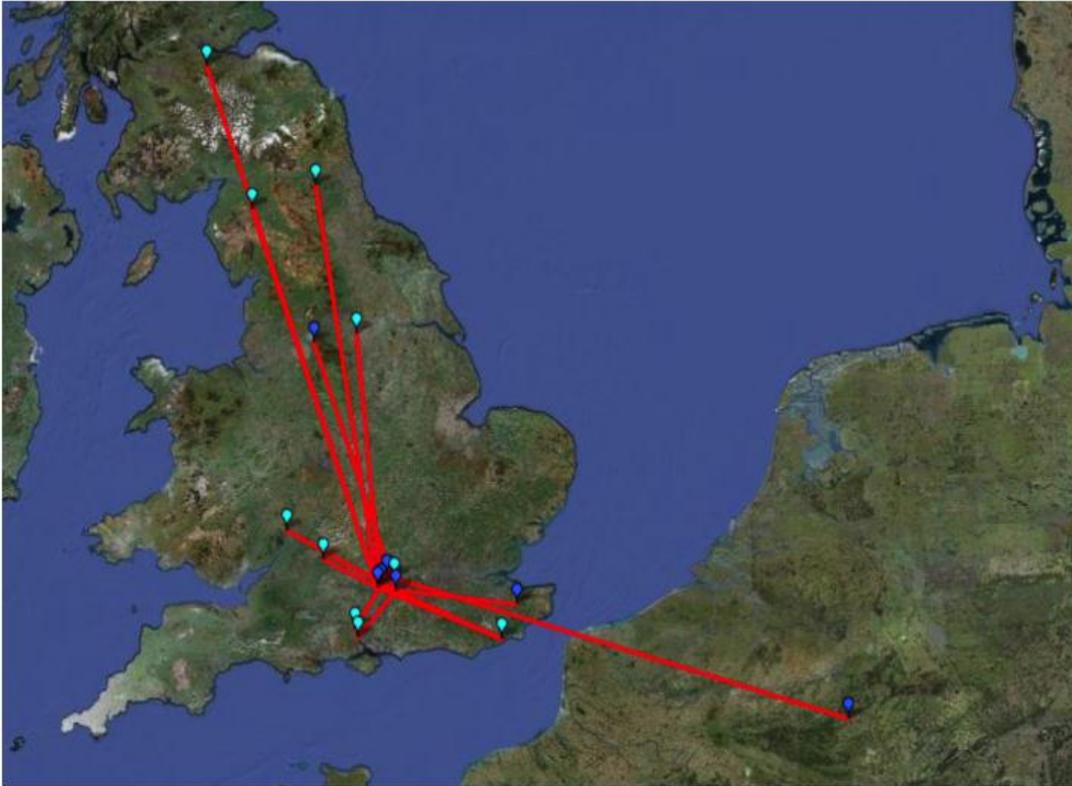
The Trust is open to all and family membership is only £5 so have a look at the website and join us, you would be amazed at all the things we have done in your Valley recently with well over £100,000 raised for projects for people and wildlife. Our current main project is reedbed restoration aided by a £5000 grant from TAG, operators of Farnborough Airport. More members gives us the strength to apply for grants as it shows how the community values the work we do so check us out, you can even find us on Twitter @bvcteditor



Bird ringing at Moor Green

By Tim Ball

We have had news from the BTO of an interesting Lesser Redpoll recovery – we ringed L281351 at Moor Green on 28 November 2010 and it was caught by ringers in Greater Manchester on 15 March 2012. On the same day we ringed this bird we also ringed Lesser Redpoll L281341 which was caught at Icklesham in Sussex on 25 October 2011. Our data on Redpolls clearly shows they have two routes to this area – south from the north of Britain and west from the continent and



Kent/Sussex but this is the first time we've had birds using both routes from the same batch of birds. Shown here is a screenshot of a map of all our Redpoll recoveries from all our sites in the last few years.

Other interesting records (recoveries – the word used for ringed birds caught elsewhere) include:

A Cormorant, colour ringed as a pullus in Belgium in May seen at Moor Green in September.

A very well observed Lesser Black-backed Gull!

FP86820 Blue AZ	20/10/2007	Gloucester landfill site
	13/04/2008	La Cueva beach, Valdes, Asturias, Oviedo, Spain
973 km, SSW, 176 days	08/02/2009	Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, Spain
1251 km, S, 1 yr 111 days	14/02/2009	Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, Spain
1251 km, S, 1 yr 117 days	05/01/2010	Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, Spain
1251 km, S, 2 yrs 77 days		

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31/01/2010	Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, Spain
1251 km, S, 2 yrs 103 days	
30/07/2010	Tice's Meadow, Badshot Lea, Surrey
127 km, SE, 2 yrs 283 days	
24/12/2010	Saint-Vaast-La-Hougue, Manche, France
260 km, SSE, 3 yrs 65 days	
04/03/2011	Moor Green Lakes, Wokingham
113 km, ESE, 3 yrs 135days	
12/08/2012	Moor Green Lakes, Wokingham
113 km, ESE, 4 yrs 297days	

For those who do not know Tice's Meadow, another birding hotspot in the area, note the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust is leading a bird walk there on March 2 this year – see page 3 of this newsletter for details.

Barn Owls at Moor Green and Manor Farm 2012

By Stuart Croft

On 15 June 2012 Stuart carried out the Barn Owl box survey for the south of Wokingham Borough. These were the results of interest to us:

Moor Green – Colebrook Lake box unsurveyed as Stock Doves were occupying. Another tree mounted box had Jackdaws occupying and two pulli were ringed by Tim Ball.

Manor Farm South (by river) - 4 chicks, 3 of which were ready to fledge.

Manor Farm North (polebox) - Bottom - 12 barn owl eggs being brooded by 2 adults. I suspect these include the failed clutch of 5 from last year.

Manor Farm North (polebox) - Attic - single failed kestrel egg.



Two Barn Owl chicks waiting to be ringed!

Across the other boxes surveyed we found similarly aged chicks about to fledge of around 8 weeks, and we suspect some may have already flown from the historically productive boxes. The hot spell in March looks to have produced very early breeding, since we usually find chicks aged from eggs to around 5 weeks. This as I understand from Colin Shawyer, a leading expert in Barn Owls, was a national trend in 2012. (*If you want to know more about Barn Owls try The Barn Owl Trust website at <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/index.html> Ed.*)

Planning applications

By Colin Wilson

Members may be unaware of some of the work undertaken by the Chairman and others for Moor Green Lakes. One of the particular activities recently has been in relation to some potentially harmful planning applications affecting Moor Green Lakes and its wildlife.

I set out overleaf, a letter sent by our Chairman which I hope will show you how diligently the Group's interests are looked after. This is one of three letters recently about developments which could have harmful effects.



I R Oldcorn
Chairman, Moor Green Lakes Group

16 January 2012

Wokingham Borough Council Planning Department
PO Box 157 Council Offices
Shute End,
Wokingham,
RG40 1WR

OBJECTION: to planning application F2012/2302 Lower Sandhurst Rd., Finchampstead

I am the Chairman of Moor Green Lakes Group; formed in 1993, MGLG manages the 36ha Moor Green Lakes nature reserve located immediately to the south of the site. We have over 500 members, including many in Finchampstead, greater Wokingham and the surrounding area, a number of who are concerned by this speculative application.

We object to this planning application for the following reasons:

- there is no need for a further grt site in Finchampstead village as there are already a number of sites in the vicinity that have yet to be occupied since approval for them was granted
- the site is in a completely unsustainable location and any future occupants will be totally reliant on car transport; also there are no footways anywhere in the locality and no safe walking routes to any local facilities such as schools, shops, medical or other community services. Furthermore, this lane is very narrow and has a 6' 6" width restriction and the site is located on a blind bend. The increased traffic will pose a serious road safety issue on a lane that is used extensively for walking, cycling and horse riding
- the proposed site is near to land designated as an Area of Special Landscape Importance and which is widely used for recreational purposes and it will have a negative impact on the surrounding area. In particular, it will be adjacent to the existing Moor Green lakes nature reserve, this local nature reserve is enclosed with post and rail fencing that should keep out horses; however it provides no barrier to domestic animals. We are concerned that any dogs or cats kept at the site will wander uncontrolled onto the site to the detriment both to the wildlife thereon and to the cows that are grazed there regularly as part of the reserve's annual management plan
- groundwater from the Finchampstead Ridges to the north drains under the land of this proposed development site into Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, located immediately to the south. As there is no main drainage in this lane, the development will create a risk of sewage polluting the lake at this prestigious bird watching site.

Please refuse this application.

Yours sincerely,

Iain R Oldcorn
Chairman - MGLG

(Note: Anyone with planning experience who would like to help us or any other wildlife groups in the Blackwater Valley area would be a valuable asset to the community so please make yourself known if you would like to help and/or advise. Ed.)



Small Mammal Trapping

By Bernard Baverstock

In addition to the small mammal trapping session on our open day, this year I took part in The Mammal Society's "Mini Mammal Monitoring" survey.

Firstly, for the open day I had 26 traps out along the north of Colebrook Lake North. Of these 11 had animals consisting of 8 Wood Mice, *Apodemus sylvaticus*, and 3 Yellow-necked Mice, *Apodemus flavicollis*. This was different from other years in that we had no shrews or voles and Yellow-necked mice had not been recorded since the earliest surveys. Whether this is an effect of grazing we may be able to ascertain with future surveys.

For the MMM study I did two parts of the survey, Low density live trapping and Harvest Mouse nest search. Both areas were in the Manor Farm extension and the results will give a base for future reference when this land is handed over.

The live trapping protocol is to set 10 Longworth traps along a 100 metre transect and check them the second morning after locking them open, with bait, over the first night. When checked, during September, I was surprised to find every trap had an occupant. Nine of the traps had Wood Mice, while the other contained a Bank Vole, *Myodes glareolus*.

For the Harvest Mouse nest search, which is done in December, I set another 100 metre transect in an area of longer grass and tussocks of rush. The searching is done 1 metre each side of this line. When searching the second 10 metre length of the line I found a Harvest Mouse nest but it was to be the only one.

It was good to know that Harvest mice, *Micromys minutus*, are using this new area and I hope to find some on the Reserve, where they have previously been reported.

While searching the grassland there was plenty of evidence of Field Voles, *Microtus agrestis*, which of course is the major component of Barn Owl diet.



This area, as with the present reserve, will have to be carefully managed so that we retain a good small mammal population which, unfortunately for them, are an important part of the food chain.

I will be repeating the surveys in the future and also adding an April date, so if you want to help please contact me via The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust at this email address. trustee002@bvct.org.uk

