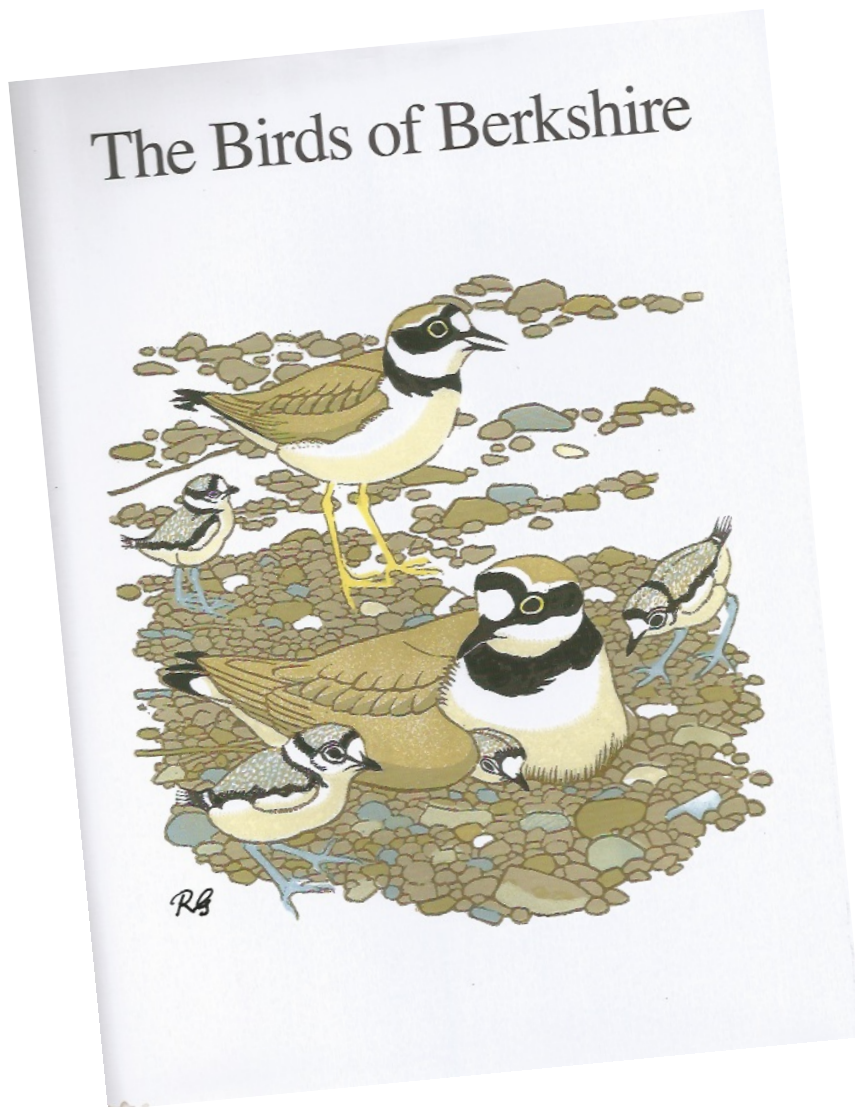


Moor Green Lakes
Group

Newsletter January 2014



See Page 3 for latest
information on this
new Book

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Can you help the Group? - Secretary vacancy

Chris Edwards our Secretary has had to offer his resignation due to an alteration in his working life, hence we need a new Secretary. The job is not substantial and can be adapted by the incumbent as he or she sees fit. The key tasks undertaken by Chris, in his own words, are as follows:

- *Prepare and circulate agenda - around 30 mins per meeting*
- *Book meeting room - phone call only*
- *Printing spare copies of agenda plus minutes ready for meeting - around 30 minutes in all (stapling etc plus printing costs)*
- *Attend quarterly meetings and take minutes - around 3 hours per meeting (including collecting and returning keys)*
- *Prepare and circulate draft minutes - around 4 hours per meeting (typing up, dealing with adjustments)*
- *Circulate final version of minutes by email*
- *Attend AGM - around 3 hours*

Help and advice will be given to anyone taking on the role so please let Adrian Hobbs know if you would like to try the role, or to get any further information. Email him at cah@hobbsnet.org Key requirement is to have a computer and be able to email papers.

We take this opportunity to thank Chris for his work for the Group and wish him well in his career.

Tooling Up!

The Group needs tools to do much of the conservation work at Moor Green. Often such tools are provided by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership but they are having to reduce their time and effort at Moor Green for financial reasons. We have therefore purchased some tools of our own starting with some forks for the delightful job of removing bramble from islands etc!! Cost approximately £80 from Group Funds.



Snipe at Colebrook Scrape by Roger Murfitt

Many members may have seen in The Times, Daily Mail or Bird Watching magazine images of a Barn Owl being deprived of its freshly caught vole in flight by a Kestrel. The series of images are outstanding and worthy of such acclaim. They were taken by Chris Armstrong on a walk in the area and you can see them at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2522687/kestrel-steals-vole-right-barn-owls-talons.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Thanks to those members who helped me track this down. Ed.

At Waitrose Yateley, MGLG was recently chosen as a local cause in their green token scheme and we were delighted to have been awarded £197 for Group funds.

The Birds of Berkshire

We are delighted to announce the launch of this book, seven years in the planning, data collection and completion. The book is a complete history of birds in the county but has also compared birdlife in Berkshire with the first edition 'Birds of Berkshire' based on surveys in 1987-89 and published in 1996. So the new book covers a full twenty years of evolution and shows how such a short time in evolutionary terms has changed our birdlife remarkably and it's all here in this book. A study of climate change, comparison of land uses and of course the identification of birds we have gained and lost over the period. Changes in local abundance are reflected and given the inclusion of winter atlas data we were able to compare migration patterns of some of our common birds.

The book also contains a detailed 'Where to watch birds in Berkshire' section with all the main sites being covered in glorious colour and with maps and lists of the birds most likely to be found.

Each species account has an original drawing or painting of the species created especially for the book and while many have been sold to sponsors some of the original artwork is still available to buy. See

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bocbirds/sets/72157637385922673/> for these and contact colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk for prices and details. Prices start at just £25.

Many photographs of rarities, mainly by Berkshire photographers, are featured in a 520 page volume. See the Kingfisher on Page 4 by Roger Milligan, one of those contributing.

If you would like a copy of this book, price £35, please contact Brian Clews by email brian.clews@btconnect.com or download the form from <http://berkshirebirdatlas.org.uk/> We are sure you will enjoy many hours of entertainment.

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO A CHARITABLE FUND FOR BIRD CONSERVATION IN BERKSHIRE

Here are a few comments from readers:

'I collected my books, and they are superb'

'I was supposed to save my Atlas for Santa to bring, but have been unable to resist delving in ..!

I just wanted to congratulate all involved - and not least Rob Still for his design work - for a really splendid job on the new Atlas. It is a wonderful production and I really feel that it will be up there with the best. The amount of work involved is awesome to contemplate. The content and detail is awesome, but it is a visual delight too.'

'It's a decent sized book with lots of good photos and illustrations and I have to say I'm actually tempted to read it from cover to cover and I've never done that with any atlas or county avifauna before.

I'd like to congratulate the editorial team for pulling together such a wonderful publication which I suspect will easily stand out as one of the best county avifaunas that are currently being published'

'Received the Atlas yesterday and was very impressed with the quality and presentation. It's good to see a thorough publication on good quality paper. A lot of effort has gone into it and I am pleased to have some of my illustrations used in this fine book.' (Ernest Leahy, artist).

The Birds of Berkshire

Your chance to own some original artwork!

Moor Green Lakes Group contributed to the book by sponsoring the Goosander and by purchasing the original artwork (below) for this bird, the Moor Green Lakes Group logo.

We plan to auction the original artwork at the AGM on the 6th of March. Please come along and bring your wallet and/or cheque book with you. All funds raised will benefit the Group.



By Roger Milligan

Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes (Aug to 12th Dec 2013)

By Roger Murfitt

There was a good autumn wader migration this year, mostly on the New Workings. Attractive muddy edges were revealed as the warm summer weather caused water levels to drop back, though the best areas were mostly at the far side so views were sometimes quite distant. Wader visitors during August and September included a further Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Little ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, a further Wood Sandpiper on 10th August, up to 11 Green Sandpiper, 2 Greenshank, 2 Curlew and at least 2 Ruff. The first Ruff on 1st Sept was the first for the area since 2009 and I was fortunate to be able to show this bird to Moor Green Lakes Open Day visitors on the bird walk. We also saw a group of 4 Ravens fly overhead on the same day (first since 2010) so it was a productive 2 hour walk!

Later in the autumn a Jack Snipe was seen for a couple of weeks at the start of October, showing quite well at times. This is normally a very skulking species which stays in deep cover and it may well still be present around the area but not showing. There were sightings of two different Merlins, a male on 13th Sept and a female on 11th Oct which very obligingly sat on a post on East Fen for the lucky observers. On the passerine front, Wheatear, Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher all passed through during the autumn. As we moved into winter the migrants have inevitably quietened down and water levels on New Workings have risen considerably. Wildfowl numbers are building up, there has been a male Goldeneye present for a while and a recent count of was made of 25 Goosander at the Grove Lake roost.

Don't forget to let all our recorders know your wildlife sightings at Moor Green by contacting them direct or use the recording sheets in the hides.

Crassula helmsii: an aggressive invader

by Peter Scott

Invasive aliens are common nuisances on nature reserves throughout the country and we have our share at Moor Green. The one that has the greatest adverse effect on the quality of our habitats is probably *Crassula helmsii*, commonly known as New Zealand Pygmyweed or Australian Stonecrop.

This plant was first imported to Britain from Tasmania shortly before the First World War as an oxygenator for ponds and aquaria. It was first recorded in the wild in the mid-1950s, since when it has spread rapidly. It forms dense mats on muddy shorelines and just below the water, out-competing native plant species and virtually destroying the habitat for invertebrates. A consequence of this is that the shores become unattractive to wading birds which might otherwise find them a rich source of food. As the scale of the problem became clear, its release into the wild was made an offence under the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This has clearly been too weak an action to prevent its spread and from April 2014 its sale will be illegal. [Why has it taken so long?].



Its vigour may be partly due to the variant of the photosynthetic process that it employs, known as Crassulacean Acid Metabolism (CAM). As the term implies, this was first identified in the Crassulaceae, the Stonecrop family, of which *C. helmsii* is a member, though it has since been found to operate in

quite a wide range of plant families. In this process, the plant's stomata open at night to admit CO₂, which is fixed as an acid and stored in vacuoles (i.e. cavities) within the leaves until daylight returns. The stomata then close and the stored acid is released to the remaining stages of photosynthesis. Another feature of CAM is that those further stages are more efficient than in the variation of photosynthesis used by the majority of plants, as the carbon-rich acid is concentrated more directly around the sites where the 'light-powered' reactions occur.



As can be imagined, the closing of stomata during daylight limits the plant's loss of water and is an adaptation to drought conditions: many plants in this family are found in semi-arid habitats. Clearly lack of water is not a problem for an aquatic like *C. helmsii*, so its possession of CAM is presumably just an inheritance from a common ancestor. Why it should be so much more vigorous than native

aquatic species is not clear, but may be partly due to the second feature of CAM mentioned above – the concentration of the fixed carbon where it is needed.

So, what can we do about it? Probably not much, at any rate not on a large scale. Possible treatments are:

- mechanical (i.e. dig it up). This is very hard work and only practicable on a small scale. Further, professional advice says 'don't do it', as the plant can propagate from very small fragments, which will obviously be produced by such physical treatment;

- shade it with (e.g.) old carpet, black plastic sheets.... This does, indeed, kill it;
- treat with herbicide. There are no longer any herbicides that are legal for use on submerged plants. Plants on the bank can be treated with (e.g.) Roundup if they dry out enough;
- biological (i.e. identify something that eats it). None is known. We have tried all the first three. A few years ago, parts of the scrape near Grove hide were covered with old carpet for a several weeks. This worked, but a year later the infestation was just as bad as before the treatment. We applied herbicide to the scrape in front of Colebrook hide when it was clear of water at the end of a dry summer (remember that?). Again, this killed (most of) the weed, but the effect was short-lived. One problem with both these approaches is that the dead weed still has to be removed physically if bare mud is to be restored. The best we can do is probably to dig it up from those areas where its impact is most obvious, such as near Colebrook hide. Of course this will produce fragments, but in a location without strong currents these should not infest new areas: rather, they are likely to grow close to where they were removed, so the situation will not be made worse. However, the improvement will be temporary: *C. helmsii* will certainly return to the cleared area and the process will have to be repeated.

[Both pictures © Crown Copyright 2009, by courtesy of GBNNSS]



'HOMES FOR BATS' APPEAL

Bat populations have suffered severe declines during the past century and they need our help.

Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust's Bat Walks are always popular and give people the chance to experience the wonder of bats in their natural environment. We are lucky enough to have 18 species in the UK, 17 of which are known to be breeding here - that's almost a quarter of our mammal species. In the Blackwater Valley we currently have eight resident species including Daubenton's Bat (Water Bat), Common Pipistrelle, and the Soprano Pipistrelle, and four others have been seen in areas local to the Valley.

To survive, bats need water and insects to eat, places to hunt, roost sites (places to hibernate, sleep and raise their babies) and safe routes between these different locations.

The Blackwater Valley provides an ideal environment for all of these except for roost sites because there is a shortage of old trees. **Bat boxes are one solution to this problem.**

BVCT is launching a 'Homes for Bats' appeal

The aim is to support and encourage bats to visit and stay in the Blackwater Valley by upgrading existing bat boxes and providing new ones (if we can raise enough money) To support the popular bat walks by upgrading current bat detectors and buying a portable spotlight so that the bats can be seen in flight.

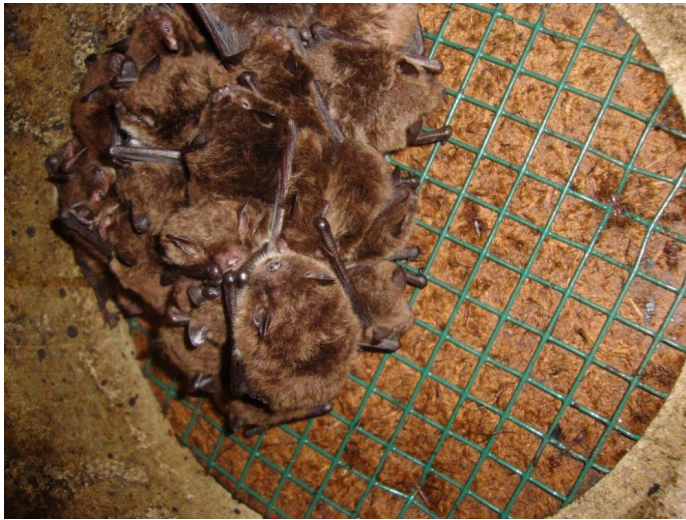
For example, if we were to raise £1000, this could purchase:

6 Bat Boxes + 2 Colony Bat Boxes + 1 Spotlight + 4 Bat Detectors

But we want to do much more, including at Moor Green Lakes

Please help us - use [this link](#) to donate securely now

Visit www.bvct.org.uk for bat facts and to see how we are progressing during 2014



This bat box in the Blackwater Valley contained a colony of about 20 Water Bats huddled together at the top of the box. They have lovely glossy, chestnut-coloured deep fur to keep them warm.

Report from the Ranger

Stuart Croft the BVCP Ranger for Moor Green Lakes sent an update of tasks undertaken in recent months. Apart from the scheduled work of clearing scrub from the west of Long Island and lakeside areas, the following activities were undertaken:

- Repairing fences after cow escapades
- Installing repainted sign by river in new frame (MGLG made a £100 contribution)
- Clearing up after contractors who felled trees on Long Island. Extra staff also 'chainsawed' off stumps, treated them with pesticide and burned half the brash
- Organising a small corporate group to join a Tuesday task
- Moving pontoon
- Goat checking (volunteers still welcome)
- Fix old boat damaged by contractors, then delivered to MGL for Long Island access (this is stored at MGL during goat grazing / contractor season)
- Fixing reptile hibernaculum with students
- Delivering stakes and binders for hedge-laying.

A vandalised tern platform ended up in Colebrook South requiring a journey back to its proper home which has now been done with a more secure fixing.

The Group remains grateful for the support and help from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership which is vital to the management of the reserve

CEMEX AND RSPB UPDATE - MANOR FARM AND FLEET HILL FARM

By Simon Weeks

Cemex are about to submit a planning application to Wokingham Borough Council, to vary the previously agreed restoration plans for Manor Farm and Fleet Hill Farm. The application will probably seek a 5 year extension, to extend the deadline for the restoration of both sites to 2019. The delay is caused by the weak construction market, resulting in a reduced demand for aggregate and a lack of inert material (rubble) to infill the pits at Manor Farm. Routes of the proposed footpaths and bridleways at Manor Farm will also be included in the application. For Fleet Hill Farm, Cemex are now proposing a significant reduction in the previously agreed public right of way network, to create undisturbed potential Bittern habitat to the west of the Fleet Hill Farm site. Subject to this being approved by Wokingham Borough Council, it is anticipated that RSPB would take on both Manor Farm and Fleet Hill sites by 2019. Therefore, if approved, Manor Farm and Fleet Hill Farm could potentially become the first RSPB site in Berkshire. Details of the planning application will be available via a link on the Moor Green Lakes website in the new year.