

Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter August 2014



Roe Deer swimming across Colebrook Lake – Martin Seward

Main Contents

| | |
|--------|--|
| Page 2 | RSPB says 'Moor Green Lakes Group is priceless' Maintenance of Colebrook Hide |
| Page 3 | Our new MGLG Secretary - Julian Le Patourel Learning more about Bats |
| Page 4 | Recent Bird Sightings (January to June 2014) |
| Page 5 | Breeding Oystercatchers at Moor Green Lakes |
| Page 6 | Moor Green's Barn Owls |
| Page 7 | Migrant Butterfly Visitors to Moor Green Lakes |
| Page 8 | Open Day poster – 31st August |

Volunteers are always needed for helping nature in the Blackwater Valley. Our Group always welcomes help both practical for work parties or for some of the administrative duties. The Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust also needs helpers so please think about giving something back for nature. Contact Adrian Hobbs or Colin Wilson for details.

RSPB says “Moor Green Lakes Group is priceless”

By Colin Wilson

At the June Committee meeting of the Group, we were pleased to greet Mike Coates, Sites Manager for the RSPB. Mike is looking after the negotiations between the various parties involved in the proposed RSPB reserve at Finchampstead.

The negotiations are not easy hence it's not possible to be certain the RSPB will be taking over the Manor Farm and Fleethill Farm workings yet but if they do, they have some grand plans for wildlife on a 150 ha reserve with wet woodland, scrub, wet and dry grassland, the centrepiece of which will be 30ha of reedbeds where hopefully, Bitterns will flourish. The reserve will be a 'quiet' reserve, there will be no visitor centre or shop, but there will be hides, viewing screens and extra car parking provided.

The Moor Green Lakes Reserve will be part of the land under the RSPBs wing but no firm plans have been decided on how this will be incorporated. The Moor Green Lakes Group is highly valued due to its long reserve management experience, quality recording of wildlife and volunteering membership. A dialogue has now started to ensure we all work together for the best outcome for all involved and for wildlife in particular.

The timing of all this is affected by the need to revise the planning permission for restoration to reduce the potential wildlife disturbance and the CEMEX plan to extend quarrying for a few more years. Looking at the practicalities it may well be about four years before we see RSPB presence at Moor Green Lakes but we can feel sure that when they come we will see some great benefits for wildlife here. As time passes we hope to keep you all informed of progress on the development of the reserve.

Maintenance of the Colebrook Lake Hide

By Adrian Hobbs



Following comments and clear problems with it, Tony Barnes, a Committee Member, and I refurbished the wheelchair extension in the Colebrook Hide. This consisted of removing the roof felt and adding a new high performance covering to the roof and sloping front. The hide floor was also treated with bleach to kill the fungus that was taking hold due to its dampness.

Previously, Tony had fitted additional benches, along the rear wall, that he had constructed. The only cost to the group was to buy the wood and varnish used in construction of the benches.

I should like to formally thank Tony for his excellent work.



Our new MGLG Secretary - Julian Le Patourel

A Biographical note

At its AGM on 6 March 2014 the Moor Green Lakes Management Group welcomed Julian Le Patourel to be its secretary.



Julian had worked in various roles in London government and at Thames Water where his last post before retirement in 1997 was as Assistant Company Secretary. Until December 2012 he had part time paid employment in both secretarial roles and in the distribution of grants for environmental projects under the Landfill Communities Fund.

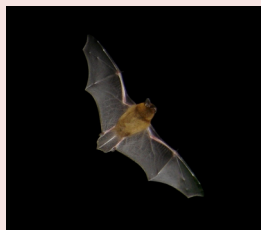
His voluntary work has included 13 years as a school governor in Reading and Wokingham and this involved for a time being secretary of the Kendrick Trust, a charity working for the benefit of Kendrick School. He is now secretary of two other local community groups, the Finchampstead Society and the Finchampstead Ridges Advisory

Group.

His interest in Moor Green Lakes stems from the fact that the room in his house which he uses as an office has excellent views over Colebroke Lake. Moreover the car park in Lower Sandhurst Road has been the starting point for countless walks past the lakes with family and friends.

His other interests include his family (he has two grandchildren), walking and music – especially opera. He is trying, with questionable success, to learn to play the piano.

Moor Green Lakes Group thanks Julian for taking on this role for the Group – we hope his example will be followed by others in our membership. Ed



Learning more about Bats

Our Group is supporting the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust special 'Homes for Bats' appeal for 2014. There are two dates when you can go and find bats using bat detectors with the Trust. The first is 19th September at Sandhurst and the second is 26th September at Aldershot. Further details are on the website www.bvct.org.uk

Recent bird sightings (January to June 2014)

By Roger Murfitt (*Bird Recorder*)

The first winter period of 2014 was relatively mild with no really hard weather to push birds in from the Continent. Scarce waterfowl included a male Smew for most of Jan and Feb, which was often seen associating with and even displaying to the Goosanders at the roost on Grove Lake. Another scarce duck to visit was the normally sea-going Scaup, a male of which was seen occasionally on Grove Lake in Jan and Feb. Wigeon numbers reached a noteworthy peak of 523 on 11th Jan but roosting Goosander numbers were relatively low (peak of 29) and counts at other waters suggested that they were roosting elsewhere in the area.

During March a summer-plumaged Water pipit was seen briefly on the New Workings which is the first record since 2008. There was a good spring passage of waders with a flock of 28 Bar-tailed godwits (first since 2006), 5 Whimbrel, a single Sanderling and a Wood Sandpiper and several sightings of Dunlin. Other spring migrants included a Marsh harrier which passed through quickly and a Whinchat which spent over a week in the area near to Colebrook hide. Peregrine falcons continue to be seen on occasion and on 24th March I was alerted by the sound as one took a Green woodpecker in mid-air and then flew past me onto the New Workings.

The most unusual record of the year so far was of a Golden Oriole which I heard singing in woodland on the northern side of the New Workings on 17th May. This bird usually remains hidden in the woodland canopy and true to form this bird failed to show itself. However, the fluty song is quite distinctive once known and always puts me in mind of the tropics as it has that sort of a feel. I was able to listen to and record the song on my camera video facility for over an hour but despite best efforts to get the news out via the Berksbirds website, by the time other birders arrived it had stopped singing. According to the Birds of Berkshire there have been no more than 13 records of this species in Berkshire since 1900 – needless to say it is a new addition to the Moor Green Lakes species list!

In terms of breeding species, we were pleased to see a significant Black-headed gull colony re-establish itself again. The tern rafts were occupied first but then birds also began to nest on Tern Island. There seem to have been at least 40 nests but it is difficult to get a definitive count since the vegetation has grown up. Common terns joined the colony with around 4 or 5 pairs mostly nesting out of sight among the vegetation outside the fence area. Having Black-headed gulls around in numbers is beneficial for the terns in that they will collectively mob and drive off birds such as crows which could otherwise more easily predate the nests.

(Note: Being a resident of Frimley Green I have access to the fishing lakes there where an island has been used by many Black-headed Gulls and a few terns for the last few years since it was cleared on an annual basis. This year the island was not cleared and effectively made unusable as the fishermen have been concerned about the effects of the gulls on water quality on what is a very important carp lake. It seems that the birds that came originally from Moor Green Lakes went to Frimley and have now returned to their original site at Moor Green Lakes. Ed.)

Breeding Oystercatchers at Moor Green Lakes

By Roger Murfitt



***Oystercatcher pair with two chicks being fed freshwater mussel on Tern Island
(Photo - Martin Seward)***

As those of you who have visited the reserve this Spring may have noticed, a pair of Oystercatchers have nested on Tern Island this year. Not surprisingly this is the first time this species has nested at Moor Green Lakes as this species is a rare breeder in the county having nested for the first time in Berkshire in 2010. An Oystercatcher (presumed male) was first seen on the reserve from 13th March and remained from then on apparently holding territory on Tern Island before being joined by a partner from 13th April. One of the birds was seen sitting from 29th April and two young were seen to have hatched on 26th May, the wet bank holiday Monday. Once the young had hatched, one of the adults (female?) would remain with the young while the other would fly off to find food. The parents were bold and aggressive in defence of the nest and young, and were seen pursuing vigorously a Lesser Black-backed gull that flew over the island and clearly dominating their Black-headed gull neighbours. Indeed I saw one adult get hold of an adult gull by the neck in one of the disputes and ended up with a beak full of feathers. Initial concerns that the chicks might be trapped within the fenced area of Tern Island proved unfounded as there was a sufficient gap for them to move in and out under the fence. Early in the season the food items taken to the young were often earthworms, which were seen being collected from the scrape and also the pony paddock. Later as the ground dried out more, and possibly as they were more suitable for larger chicks, the adults brought in more freshwater mussels. According to *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, the duration of the period when juveniles are dependent upon adults varies widely depending on the dominant food. Where worms are the dominant food the juveniles can feed themselves efficiently within 6 weeks and the family usually splits up after 6-8 weeks; when bivalve molluscs are the main food the juveniles take much longer to become competent in feeding themselves and the family may stay together for 12 – 26 weeks. In the case of the Moor Green Lakes birds feeding on mussels we might expect the family to stay together longer – certainly they were still together with both chicks on 9th July at just over 6 weeks old but they have begun to range more widely and I have not seen them since. We look forward to their possible return next breeding season.

Moor Green's Barn Owls

By Stuart Croft (BVCP Ranger)

Roger Murfitt and a gaggle of volunteers joined us in June for the annual Barn Owl nest



box breeding survey. These protected raptors are in need of our support, so it's good to boost the number of suitable nest sites. Thanks to my work with the Wokingham Barn Owl Project over the last 10 years, I have the experience and license to carry out the survey. This means we can monitor the population, and also clear out the boxes that would otherwise become unusable by Barn Owls when they are filled with sticks by other species such as squirrels and Stock Doves.

The Moor Green Lakes box hosted a Stock Dove clutch, although there were Barn Owl



roost signs with pellets in the box and in trees nearby. On Manor Farm the box closest to the river supported an adult owl with 6 chicks. The box closest to Lower Sandhurst Road held 2 adult barn owls and a clutch of 12. Unfortunately based on previous years we suspect this pair is infertile so the eggs may not hatch. The polebox design means there is a separate nest hole where Kestrels happily co-exist, this time with 2 chicks and an egg.

Overall this year the breeding success here and throughout the 20 boxes in Wokingham Borough was good, with the Barn Owls breeding around four weeks early. This fits the preliminary national findings probably due to the warm Spring. As a spin-off from the survey owl pellets were collected at Manor Farm and Moor Green. Last year Bernard Baverstock dissected them for his small mammal survey confirming the presence of water shrews.

Birds of Berkshire

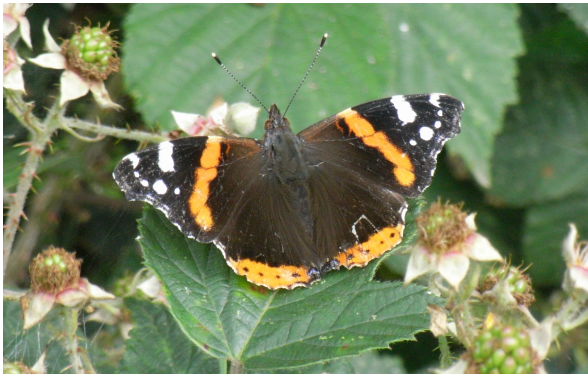
Copies are still available at a £5 discount to members of MGLG. Order yours on <http://berkshirebirdatlas.org.uk/the-birds-of-berkshire-atlas-avifauna/>

Migrant Butterfly Visitors to Moor Green Lakes

By John Westmacott, Butterfly Recorder

On 23rd May 2009, as I stood on the platform at Eastleigh station in Hampshire, having enjoyed an open day at the local railway works, I became aware of the frequent flight of butterflies across the station. The constant stream, flying powerfully northwards, heralded the start of a great invasion of Painted Ladies from their breeding grounds in Africa. Over the following days millions of these insects swept across the country providing wonderful opportunities for butterfly watchers to see this handsome butterfly. The Painted Lady is one of three migrant butterflies amongst the 60 or so breeding butterflies of the British Isles.

The most common of these is the **Red Admiral** the great majority of which migrate from the continent to Britain each year, usually arrive in late May and June. This striking butterfly of black, white and red colouring is a familiar sight. The females lay their eggs on the upper surface of nettles, these hatching in a week or so. The caterpillars form a little tent amongst the nettle leaves where they feed and within a three or four weeks form a chrysalis. The adult butterfly emerges perhaps two or three weeks later. It is towards the end of summer into autumn that the Red Admiral is at its most abundant. Some may even be flying in November, though by then most will have returned to the continent to find warmer weather for winter.



The large and distinctive **Painted Lady** breeds mainly in North Africa and Arabia and spreads north and west across Europe to reach the British Isles in variable quantities. Now and again there is a great invasion of insects such as in 2009, and they will be extremely common over the whole country, but more generally there will be a scattering in various places, and it may be that only one or two butterflies will be seen in a particular place during the year. The Painted Lady is a powerful flyer of orange-brown, white and black colouration, and usually feeds with wings outspread. It has a similar breeding cycle to the Red Admiral, and from September onwards most of the new adults will return to their breeding grounds, the remainder dying before winter.

A third migrant is the rather beautiful, but much scarcer, **Clouded Yellow**. This butterfly winters in North Africa and the southern countries of Europe, and flies northwards to reach Britain in generally quite small numbers in May and June. These usually penetrate no further than the southern counties of England, but the offspring of these immigrants will during August spread northwards and may even



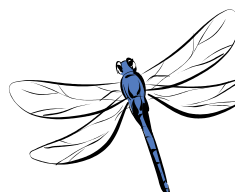
reach Scotland. Every so often a great invasion occurs and vast numbers spread across the country. The Clouded Yellow is a golden-yellow insect, with black edges to the upper wings and various spots and a distinctive eye on the underside. It is a fast, powerful flyer, and when it stops to feed, it invariably closes its wings. Although a few individuals may survive the winter, the majority migrate in the autumn. In 2013, after a gap of ten years, three individual Clouded Yellows were seen at Moor Green Lakes during August and September.

Please continue to record sightings of butterflies seen on the Reserve on the record sheet in the hides. Thank you.

MOOR GREEN LAKES NATURE RESERVE



Open Day
Free Entry



Sunday 31st August
9 am - 1 pm

**Guided Walks to learn about the wildlife at Moor
Green Lakes and to view Bird Ringing**

Meet the experts:

- Bird ringing
- Nest Box Life
- Moths, and Fungi

For the young at heart

- Mammal trapping
- Pond dipping
- Bug Hunting

Bring your own Fungi for identification
**Learn about the reserve and how you may become
involved**

**Extended Free Car Park,
Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, RG40 3TF**

For more information and programme visit: www.mglg.org.uk



Moor Green Lakes Group

