

# Moor Green Lakes Group

Newsletter February 2016



Just in case members missed seeing rain at Moor Green in 2015, enjoy this image of two rainbows from Colebrook hide! *By Roger Murfitt*

## Main Contents

Page 2	AGM, Shelduck nestbox and Newsletter Editor vacancy
Page 3	Work Programme
Page 4 /5	The work of the Committee
Page 5 /6	Recent bird sightings
Page 6	The Birds of Berkshire
Page 7	Butterfly Recorder vacancy and Bat Box Survey
Page 8	The White Butterflies

## Moor Green Lakes Group AGM

For various reasons our AGM is later this year, watch out for the AGM notice for 28th April. The AGM will again be at Finchampstead Memorial Hall and further details will be in the notice. Make a note in your diary so you don't miss it. We are expecting to hear from the RSPB, our main speakers on the night – one not to be missed!

## Shelduck nest-box renovation

*by Roger Murfitt*

After our first breeding record, Shelducks returning to Moor Green Lakes to prospect for nest sites this spring will find a brand new “des-res” awaits them on Plover Island. This is after someone accidentally put their foot through the (rotten) roof of the old wooden box during the working party on Plover Island in the autumn!

Stuart Croft (BVCP Ranger) and two colleagues came to the rescue and completely rebuilt the underground chamber using paving slabs (which will be much more weather resistant) with a mixture of gravel/sawdust added to the floor to give a dry base for nesting (see photo courtesy of S Croft and BVCP). A layer of gravel will be added on top of the roof slab to help reduce potential for overheating..



Jenny and Mark by the sunken nest chamber

## NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Colin Wilson has now been the Newsletter Editor for over ten years. He has decided to pass on the baton to a successor. The job really consists of joining Committee meetings to keep in touch with developments, asking and cajoling Committee and members to provide articles and photographs and compiling them into a Newsletter twice a year. If you think you could do that please contact Colin on [colin.wilson@mglg.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@mglg.org.uk) for further information.

## Work programme: January - March 2016

Much of this activity will have taken place before you read this Newsletter but it is provided to give an example of the kind of tasks enjoyed by our volunteers and supported by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP).

The Sunday tasks are run by the Moor Green group itself and take place on the second Sunday of each month. The Tuesday tasks are run by BVCP, but volunteers from Moor Green Lakes Group are, of course, always welcomed. All work parties begin at 10.30 and finish mid-afternoon, just turn up in your gardening gear if you would like to help!

We always need more helpers: the work to be done has always exceeded that which we have been able to accomplish. You would be more than welcome to join any of our work parties, if only for part of the day.

It is always advisable to check the Moor Green Lakes website before turning up just in case of unexpected cancellation or change. The meeting place is the car park on Lower Sandhurst Road as always.

		<b>Sunday</b>		<b>Tuesday</b>
<b>January</b>	10th	Clear Tern Island.  With <b>Stuart</b> as 1 of the 2 boat drivers	26th	a) Thin woodland beside 'ochreous steam' at eastern end of Colebrook Lake South. b) Clear shoreline scrub in same area. c) Cut hedge-layingstakes& binders (moved from Feb so binders fresh for hedge-laying)
<b>February</b>	14th	Clear vegetation from western and central scrapes on north shore of Long Island	2nd	a) Lay remaining hedge to Colebrook Hide. b) Cut footpath and bridleway between car park and river. c) Clear in front of Colebrook screen. (moved from Dec)
<b>March</b>	13th	Clear scrub from 'scallops' on north shore of Grove Lake.	Thurs 3rd	Mystery task (probably dealing with jobs not achieved earlier).

### Update from Ranger Stuart

In December there was a double task at Moor Green Lakes working on Long Island. On the Tuesday we descended with the Blackwater Valley Volunteers to set up the pontoon crossing, motorscythe the bramble for a fire site and cut back the mainland willow. Our Long Island work of clearing the vegetation for over-wintering wildfowl is usually focused at the western end, where there are good views from the hide. This time we tackled the eastern end where the track access had become very overgrown. Also we exposed a hidden scrape where the shallow muddy "bay" is ideal for waders and invertebrates.

The team got stuck into felling trees on the narrow bund which separates the scrape from the main lake. I was surprised to discover that this scrape has a channel into the lake at both ends, so the central bund is in effect a baby island, hence lots of leaping across the gap and bridge building. On Thursday we were joined by the 'Blooming Marvellous' which is a Supported Adult Volunteer Gardening Project. The project aims to empower those who want to volunteer in the community, but would need some support to do so. All the Blooming Marvellous and Blackwater Valley Volunteers did a fantastic job and many thanks for everyone who helped."

## **Moor Green Lakes Group – The Work of the Committee.**

*By Julian Le Patourel*

More than quarter of a century ago, in March 1994, a steering group was established by Hall Aggregates, as part of the management plan to restore the gravel pits into what are now the Horseshoe Lakes water recreation centre and the Moor Green Lakes nature reserve. Among the group's first actions was the approval of a constitution for the management of the reserve. This constitution in turn set up a Moor Green Lakes Group with a membership "open to any person expressing an interest in the reserve". The Group was to be run by a committee elected annually by the membership. To complete the formal arrangements the committee was given the power to send two representatives to meetings of the steering group on which the gravel company, now CEMEX, sits. However the steering group has not met for at least two years.

Currently the committee has ten members, three are officers (chairman, secretary and treasurer). The committee meets four times a year. It is tasked with monitoring and recording habitats, flora and fauna and protecting and promoting interest in these features; with undertaking practical conservation work; and with promoting membership of the Group.

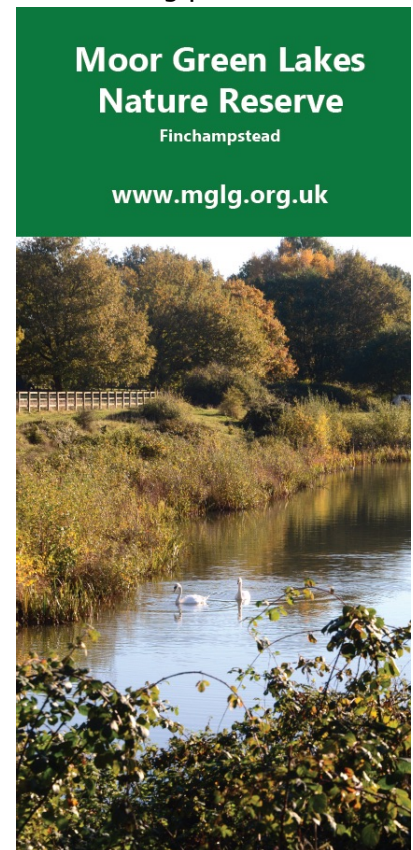
To fulfil its objects the committee first encourages and supports the work of the wildlife recorders. There are no fewer than ten recorders and they monitor birds, mammals, plants, butterflies, moths, reptiles, dragonflies, fungi, nest boxes and beetles and bugs. These individuals, expert in their fields, report to the committee from time to time, make formal presentations to the annual general meeting and write detailed accounts for the Group's annual report. Three are members of the committee.

Secondly the committee encourages volunteering by people willing to help with the endless task of the maintenance and improvement of the reserve, both for its conservation and for the enjoyment of the public. The volunteers are supported by professional help from the Blackwater Valley Country Partnership, one of whose rangers sits on the committee both to report progress and to invite its views on priorities for the work.

Thirdly, the committee manages a website, publishes a periodic newsletter and a detailed annual report to keep both the membership and the wider public informed about the Group's activities.

In addition the committee arranges what it intends to be a highly informative annual general meeting open to all members at which, in addition to the reports of the recorders, a presentation on a related conservation topic is laid on. For 2016 there are plans for the RSPB to tell the membership about its intentions for the future, assuming the current proposals for its adoption of the whole site from Moor Green to Fleet Hill are agreed.

Over the past year the committee has revised and reissued its leaflet (see image), has enlarged the car park in Lower Sandhurst Road and repaired the height barrier into the car park. In late August it organised the annual Open Day though, frustratingly, appalling weather resulted in a much lower attendance than in 2014. Through its treasurer the committee has made sure that the Group's finances have remained in good order and at present there is a reassuring balance in the Group's accounts. Some of the committee's work lies in encouraging CEMEX to contribute to the maintenance of the reserve and it has also enjoyed excellent support from one of its commercial neighbours, the plant nursery at Manor Farm in Lower Sandhurst Road.



The present officers of the committee are Adrian Hobbs, the chairman, whose professional engineering skills came to the fore during the repairs to the height barrier into the car park; Julian Le Patourel, the secretary who spent twenty years in company secretary roles at Thames Water; and Steve Arnold, the treasurer who enjoys regular walks round the reserve and Manor Farm in between looking after the money.

### Unlawful fishing

One of the things exercising the Committee recently has been instances of fishing on the reserve which is not permitted. Some people have been photographed and they are often asked to leave but we advise caution if you approach someone when you are alone. The Committee is planning further clear signs to discourage fishing on the reserve.



There will be an election of officers of the committee at the next annual general meeting to be held on 28 April 2016. All members are encouraged to come along to what promises to be a very interesting evening.

### Recent bird sightings (July to Dec 2015).

*By Roger Murfitt (Bird Recorder)*

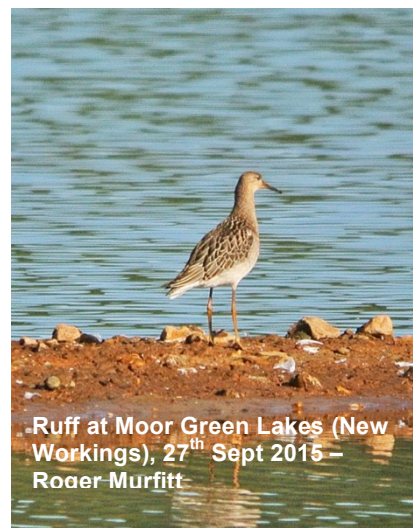
Breeding bird activity continued into the second half of the year with at least 4 broods of young Great-crested Grebes seen, a few broods of Tufted Duck and also young Little Grebes on Manor Lake and the New Workings. Autumn migration for some species is under way by July and passage Common Sandpipers as well as returning Green Sandpipers were seen in this month. The Dutch-ringed Green Sandpiper individual that has been around the reserve over 6 winters was confirmed again from photographs on 18<sup>th</sup> Aug though not reported since. Autumn wader passage was pretty



good in 2015, helped by low water levels on the New Workings and East Fen for several weeks from late September. Dunlins were recorded in ones and twos on at least 3 dates, up to 2 Greenshanks on several dates and up to 4 Ruff stayed on the drained New Workings from 18<sup>th</sup> Sept to 9<sup>th</sup> Oct. It was a good autumn for Wood Sandpiper sightings across the country and Moor Green Lakes did not miss out on this scarce migrant with 2 on East Fen on 29<sup>th</sup> and 1 still on 30<sup>th</sup> Aug. Black Tern is another scarce passage migrant in the county which usually passes through quickly, so the juvenile (pictured) which stayed on the New Workings from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> Aug gave an extended opportunity to catch up with this species. A migrant Garganey was carefully picked out in its drab eclipse plumage on Colebrook Lake South on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept.

There were no significant reports of passage raptors but amongst the passerines, the regular migrants, Wheatear, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail, were all seen on several dates in the autumn. The continued decline of breeding Spotted Flycatchers in the UK (down 88% from 1970 – 2011) was reflected in just the single record of a passage bird on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug. A Dartford Warbler seen in the broom bushes on the New Workings on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept was presumably a case of post-breeding dispersal from nearby heathland. There were two records of Firecrest which may be different birds, one seen with a tit flock near the sewage works at western end of New Workings on 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct and one caught and ringed at Colebrook lake on 25<sup>th</sup> October. This Firecrest 'migration' ties in with two ringed birds at Frimley around this time.

A roost of Starlings in the Manor Farm reedbed built up from several hundred in July to 2,400 in early Nov and was regularly harried by one or two Sparrowhawks as they settled in the reeds at dusk. The Sparrowhawk's hunting technique usually involved a quick pass across the reeds, just after a flock had settled and were squabbling and sorting out roosting positions, though they were unsuccessful on the occasions I watched the roost. The abundant weeds on the in-fill at the western end of New Workings attracted significant flocks of finches at the end of the year with over a hundred each of Linnets and Lesser Redpolls, whilst a flock of up to 40 Chaffinches included a single Brambling on occasions. This area also proved attractive to feeding Pied Wagtails with a peak count of 70 recorded on 21<sup>st</sup> Dec.



Ruff at Moor Green Lakes (New Workings), 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015 – Roger Murfitt

Winter visitors began to arrive in October and a Jack Snipe was seen on East Fen on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct, probably helped by the low water levels bringing this very skulking species out into the open. A Short-eared Owl was seen briefly in Manor Farm area on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct by the Mammal Recorder and helpers as they set live traps. Its failure to linger can be explained by the zero mammal capture rate achieved which shows that rodent populations remain at a low ebb on the reserve. The very mild weather during the first half of the winter no doubt contributed to relatively low numbers of wintering waterfowl as some are likely to have "short-stopped" their migration and remained on the Continent until forced to move by freezing weather. Despite this, a dusk count of roosting Goosanders on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec found a very reasonable 40 birds on Grove lake which, with a simultaneous count of 37 at Bramshill (Hants), gives a total of at least 77 in the area.

Finally a reminder to all you birders out there that since we will be starting to compile bird records for the 2015 Moor Green Lakes Annual Report, please submit any bird records for the Moor Green Lakes area for 2015 either to the [Berkbirds.co.uk](http://Berkbirds.co.uk) website or direct to me via the Contact section on the MGL website.

*Footnote: Members and visitors are always welcome to provide photographs for the Newsletter of birds or other flora and fauna found on the reserve, or just scenic images that you would like to share. Ed.*

### **The Birds of Berkshire**

This much applauded book has nearly sold out! Less than 100 copies remain so this is likely to be the last chance to get your own copy. A full avifauna with detailed species maps, a guide to the best birdwatching sites in Berkshire and habitats section has all birdwatchers will ever need to know about the County. Priced at £35 and free of Post and Packing to MGLG members, you can get it from Brian Clews [brian.clews@btconnect.com](mailto:brian.clews@btconnect.com) or phone 01628 526091 or Waterstone's, Broad Street, Reading have a supply that's running out fast.



### **Butterfly Recorder** by John Westmacott

I have advised the Moor Green Committee that I intend to give up the responsibility of Butterfly Recorder at the close of the Summer recording period this year, and I should like to be able to hand over to another Butterfly enthusiast at that time. It is a rewarding and at times exciting responsibility, giving opportunity to visit parts of the reserve outside the public domain. It also requires regular visits to the reserve throughout the season from April to September. If anyone would like to take it on or know more about what is involved, please contact me either by phone 0118 978 8609, or e-mail [westmarj@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:westmarj@tiscali.co.uk).

## **Bat Box Surveys at Moor Green Lakes**

By Sue Cload



Bernard Baverstock and Sue Cload carried out the Moor Green Lakes survey with much appreciated assistance and muscle from Will, Jane and Carole! We checked 20 boxes and put up 3 new ones. The new ones are part of the Bat Appeal and aim to extend the roosting sites for Bats along the Blackwater Valley corridor.

The survey was late this year in November so we knew it was unlikely that there would be bats roosting in the boxes and that proved to be true. However we like to clear out the boxes ready for the bats to use next year, and check what, if anything, has been using them.

We found a few surprises this year! There are often bird nests in the bat boxes at Moor Green Lakes and we found five nests and three others with bird droppings, probably from roosting birds. The photograph on the right shows a bat box with the front removed. The birds have to fly in through the bat entrance at the bottom of the box and up behind to build the nest.

Mammals may be short on the reserve this year but we also found two Mouse nests! They had climbed the trees and made nice cosy homes in the bat boxes.



Then there were the Hornets nests! The hornets seem to prefer the larger bat boxes. One nest completely filled the box and they had started building on the outside too. The hornets had also used some of the wood from the baffles inside the bat boxes as nest building material and to clear their entrance way. Luckily they had departed by the time of our check – so maybe a late survey has some advantages.

Encouraging bats in the Blackwater Valley is a project lead by Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust. ([www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk))

## The White Butterflies *By John Westmacott*

White butterflies are a familiar sight in almost every part of the UK as they make their way across fields, parks and gardens, and amongst them is one of the vegetable gardener's implacable enemies – what many people call the Cabbage White - whose caterpillars are destructive of brassicas in the vegetable patch as well as of nasturtium leaves. The chief culprit is the **Large White**, a big bold butterfly found in open ground, farmland and gardens. The female is a handsome insect with extensive black tips to her wings and prominent black spots on her forewings. She is larger than the male and has a yellowish tinge to the upper surface of her hindwing, a feature lacking in the male. The male also has black wingtips, but is otherwise generally plain white. The species has two, or three, broods each year, with slight variations between early and later butterflies. Eggs are laid in batches of up to a hundred on the underside of leaves, and hatch in about ten days. The yellowy-green and black caterpillars grow quickly, and for a month or so, like an army, they munch through the cabbages or nasturtiums leaving just a skeleton of ribs, eventually crawling away to pupate. The early adults hatch in April or May from pupae which have overwintered, whilst the summer brood, offspring of the spring adults, emerge in July and August. In some years the population is augmented by large numbers of migrants from the continent.



Large White

The **Small White** is very similar to its cousin but generally smaller and duller. Both sexes have less extensive black tips to their wings, the female retaining the two spots on her forewings, but, unlike the Large White, the male has a single spot on the upperside of his forewings. Single eggs are laid on brassica leaves, but the slightly furry green caterpillars are not as destructive as the Large White, being widely predated by beetles and birds. Apart from size, the primary difference between the two species is the amount of black around the edges of the forewings, but slight variations between first and second broods make identification a little more tricky, especially when seen in flight. The only other white butterfly which might cause confusion is the **Green-veined White**, which was covered in a previous article, but this is a more delicate insect, and has the distinctive veins on the underside of the hindwings. All these whites are common at Moor Green.



Small White



Marbled White

There is however another 'white' butterfly to be seen on the reserve, which is less common and has a much shorter flight period. This is the **Marbled White**, a very attractive insect which flies from late-June into August, peaking in mid-July. Actually this is not classified as a white butterfly at all, but rather amongst the browns. It is unmistakable with a striking black and white pattern on the upperwings, with more subdued markings on the undersides. The sexes are very similar, the female being distinguished by a yellow tinge to the hind underwings and to the leading edge of the forewings. They have a rather lazy flight with frequent glides and often perch on the tops of grasses, being quite approachable. They tend to establish colonies and do not wander as the Large and Small Whites do. A good place to see them is to look over the metal gate opposite the bottom of Dell Road where they appear year after year amongst the flowers and grasses there. They are also present in other parts of the reserve, but are not always easily visible from the public paths.