

Moor Green Lakes
Group

Newsletter August 2016



An Unexpected visitor – see Page 7

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Open Day – Sunday 4th September

Come along and bring the family from 09.00 to 12.00 to see what Moor Green Lakes has to offer those who love nature. We will have bird ringing, small mammal trapping, bug hunting and pond dipping. Add to that moths trapped overnight and some examples of fungi found on the reserve. Experts will be on hand to answer your questions. See you there!

Invasive plant alarm!

By Peter Scott

As if we didn't have enough trouble with Himalayan Balsam and New Zealand Pygmyweed, we have recently received a report of Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) in the river beside Horseshoe Lake. This plant was unrecorded in the British Isles prior to 1986, but has since then become quite widespread. It was sold as an aquarium plant for several years and has probably arrived in the wild as a 'throw-out'. Its sale is now prohibited because it causes a range of



problems including changing the availability of oxygen in the water threatening fish and invertebrates, choking drainage systems and crowding native water plants..

So far we have only the one report and have been unable to find it again. However, it could become a serious pest if it arrives. Please let us (or BVCP) know if you spot it. It has fairly distinctive kidney-shaped leaves which, as the common name implies, float on the water surface. 'Googling' the name will lead to numerous good photographs and information about the plant.

Butterfly Recording at Moor Green Lakes

For several years John Westmacott has been our Butterfly Recorder, assisted by his wife Rachel, but he has decided it is time to end his work with effect from this year. We would like to sincerely thank John for his diligent work, making many regular visits to record the life of butterflies on our Reserve. As Newsletter Editor I would also thank John on members behalf for his articles for this publication offering an insight into butterfly life here. His final article is in this publication and with this we have been able to cover all species recorded at Moor Green Lakes.

We will introduce our new Recorder, Paul Richards in a future edition of the Newsletter.

Moor Green Lakes Maintenance Work Programme: 2016

The following is a programme of site maintenance work to be carried out by volunteer groups this autumn / winter. The Sunday tasks will be run by the Moor Green Lakes Group itself and will take place on the second Sunday of each month. The Tuesday tasks will be run by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP), but volunteers from MGLG will, of course, be welcome. All work parties begin at 10.30 and finish mid-afternoon.

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, you will find them friendly and enjoyable. Please remember that we all benefit from the reserve so helping in such an enjoyable way is a nice way to give a little back.

All dates / tasks are provisional, so please check the website if uncertain.

		Sunday		Tuesday
September	11th	a) Clear small wood patches north of Colebrook Lake. b) Treat stumps. c) Cut vertical exposures for bees.	27th	a) Cut back bramble patches on north bank of Grove Lake. (motorscythe). b) Thin bramble on south bank of Grove Lake, to give cattle access to central grassland in south. c) Cut back 'cow-looker' path along north side of Grove Lake
October	9th	a) Clear scrub from scrape near Grove hide. b) Clear path along edge of Grove hide scrape.	25th	a) Clear scrub and cut back bramble on central part of Long Island. b) Clear scrub/trees around south-central scrape of Long Island c) Move pontoon to Plover Island.
November	13th	Clear Plover Island. [Set up pontoon using waders & MGL key. Wheelbarrow vegetation off island].	29th	a) Clear scrub and bramble on Long Island. b) Strim Sandpiper Island. c) Thin vegetation in eastern half of Long Island.

Annual Report of Moor Green Lakes Group

The latest report covering 2015 is now available for you to read on our website. You can find it here http://mglg.org.uk/annualreports/mglg_ar_2015.pdf

A vast amount of dedicated work is summarized here and makes very interesting reading. Many of the questions you may have concerning the wildlife and management of the reserve may well be answered here.

The first Report of this Group was produced in 1994 covering 1993 our first year. This is also available on the website with more recent reports. You can read all about sightings on the reserve and may find that you can add to these by using the lists in the hide at Colebrook Lake.

Our thanks go to the team of Recorders and compilers for producing this impressive record of our Reserve.

Recent bird sightings at Moor Green Lakes, Jan to June 2016.

By Roger Murfitt

During the first winter period of 2016, the single adult male Smew remained in residence until early March whilst Goosander numbers were unspectacular with a peak count of 31 at roost in January. Oystercatcher was first seen from 10th February and there was an early Ringed Plover over the New Workings on 7th February. A very scarce visitor was a male Common Scoter on seen briefly on Colebrook Lake North during a Wetland Bird Survey count of the site on 19th March. This normally sea-going duck can occasionally be seen on inland waters on passage but this was the first since 1994.



Common Scoter (male) 19th March 2016 (Roger Murfitt)

There was a good spring passage of waders which was helped by low water levels on the New



Greenshank on New Workings 8th May 2016 (Roger Murfitt)

Workings, due to pumping out of water, which exposed lots of spits and islands. There was a very productive few days in May with a Wood Sandpiper and 6 Greenshanks on 9th, 4 Dunlin and 2 Turnstones on 10th and a Whimbrel, 2 Grey Plovers and 4 Ringed Plovers on 11th. Other passage waders included two separate records of Black-tailed Godwit in March and April, up to 5 Common and up to 4 Green Sandpipers. Suitable winds during April brought a marked inland movement of Little Gulls across the country and Moor Green Lakes shared in this with an adult on 11th and a 2nd summer on 14th.

Other scarce migrants included a Black Redstart on the New Workings on 17th April, 2 Mediterranean Gulls on 4th April and an unseasonal Short-eared Owl which was seen over the New Workings on 22nd May.

Breeding activity began in late Feb as Black-headed Gulls began to dispute territories on Tern Island and a pair of Oystercatcher also took up residence there in March. The Oystercatchers hatched 2 young in early May but unfortunately one of these was lost though they did succeed in rearing the remaining chick to fledging. A pair of Shelduck was seen investigating the new improved underground chamber meant for this species on Plover island, but there was no evidence of successful breeding this year. Black-headed Gulls were present in good numbers in March and early April (around 70 at peak) but then numbers fell sharply in mid-April leaving a smaller number to nest. There were at least 16 nests, most on the rafts and Tern island but also two on East fen and one on Plover island. Common Terns also nested on Tern island with approximately 5 nests. At least one tern chick had hatched by 8th July (most of the nests were

hidden by vegetation) but by 16th July the terns were no longer visiting Tern island to feed young and it appears that all nests failed, possibly due to predation?

Lapwings held territory on Tern and Plover islands but there was no sign of successful nesting. Up to four Redshank were around the reserve in the Spring but it was a complete surprise when on 28th May I noticed a pair were giving alarm calls on Tern Island and I was able to see that they had hatched 3 small young inside the fenced area. On the following day the adults were seen with 2 chicks crossing the path and then the bridleway heading towards East Fen. Later one chick was seen with the adults in East fen, so at least one had survived the perilous journey from the island through hedges, ditches etc. This chick was monitored until at least half-grown so it appears that one young successfully fledged this year, which is excellent news for this declining wader species. It was normal service resumed for breeding Barn owls after the poor year last year, in fact better than normal with 2 successful pairs in two of the nestboxes.

Moor Green Lakes Butterflies - THE LAST THREE

By John Westmacott

Over the past six years or so in this series of articles on the Butterflies which have been recorded at Moor Green Lakes, we have covered 28 of the 31 species seen. We come now to the last three, Grayling, Small Heath and Speckled Wood.

The **Grayling** is a heathland butterfly, preferring areas of bare ground where the sun hardens



the surface and the vegetation is sparse. It is the largest of our brown butterflies, with pairs of eyes on yellow patches on the upper and lower surfaces of the forewings, and orange and yellow markings on the upper surface of the hindwings. The under surface of the hindwings is a mottled grey, and the butterfly's habit of folding its wings when at rest make it very difficult to spot on the ground. Indeed the first you may see of it is when it suddenly flies up from the ground in front of you. The Grayling is known for its habit of regulating its body temperature when at rest;

when it is cold it will lean sideways to the sun to get the maximum heat, and when it is too hot it faces the sun directly to expose the least area. Its rarity at Moor Green is shown by the fact that it has been spotted in only six of the past sixteen years of recording, and always as a singleton. It is one of the true summer butterflies flying in July and August.



The smallest of the brown butterflies is the **Small Heath** which can be likened to a miniature Meadow Brown. Its upper surfaces are a plain orange-brown, whilst the under surface of the forewing has a single eyespot on a like colour. The under surface of the hindwing is patchy grey-brown, which makes it hard to see when resting as it always closes its wings. This butterfly likes well-drained grassland where the turf is kept short, so that the fine grasses of its foodplant are able to flourish, and sadly at Moor Green we

do not have such conditions to encourage its presence. The last confirmed sighting was in 2009. It has two major flight periods, May into late June, and early August into September, but in suitable conditions it may well be seen continuously from May to October.

Our last butterfly is one of the most familiar and regular residents of Moor Green, the **Speckled Wood**.

Another of the brown butterflies, it is easily recognised by its dark brown wings with yellow patches and eyespots on both upper and lower surfaces. As the name suggests it is a woodland butterfly, enjoying areas where broken sunlight shines through the trees, but it also requires areas of grassland where its larvae may feed. Moor Green is ideal for its needs, and though each individual may only live for a week or so, the butterfly is common along the footpaths, or in the shaded areas within the reserve from spring through to autumn, depending as always upon the weather conditions. It has the unique ability amongst our



butterflies of hibernating either as larva or pupa, so that adults emerge in succession in the spring and onwards through the year. It is a most inquisitive butterfly which will fly up to inspect intruders, and if necessary drive away those infringing on its territory.

This concludes our series on the butterflies recorded at Moor Green, but with the increasing changes in climate and weather conditions, we may yet see new species coming onto the reserve in the years ahead. Whether we do or not, butterflies are a fascinating and beautiful subject for study.

(Photographs by John Westmacott)

An Unexpected Encounter!

By Gordon Duffus

Should any of you ever venture to the far west end of the “New Workings” toward the Longwater Road late in the morning, you may well notice three senior citizens, Roger, Tony and Gordon (that’s us) standing, nattering and staring at the Sewerage Treatment Plant. When you notice their binoculars and telescopes, you’ll realise that they are “birders” but what are they looking for and whatever do they see there?

The answer is that they are usually looking for wagtails, both grey and pied, which appear throughout the year and breed close by, feeding on the locally prolific and omnipresent insect life there. During the Autumn, which starts in August for birders, apart from the more common birds on the move such as chiffchaffs, blackcaps and willow warblers there is always the hope of a locally scarcer migrant turning up such as lesser whitethroat or spotted flycatcher, but that’s about it. However, this Autumn a rarer surprise occurred.

On 15th August, hoping forlornly for either of the latter, attention was diverted by a Red Kite over the hay meadow to the north, too distant for Roger to photograph, but we patiently waited as it slowly drifted towards us. As it drew closer, a kestrel appeared overhead to our right and as we looked up at 11:40am, Gordon saw a largish raptor up over our left shoulders, not too high, slowly but purposefully heading eastward from over the river toward the Ridges. “Hello, what’s this? That’s a very pale looking buzzard” commented Gordon. The bird was immediately dismissed as the pale looking individual recently seen in the vicinity of the owl box on Colebrook Lake North. As we continued looking at the bird through our binoculars, with the unusual sun in an unusually perfect position above and behind us, we realised that the bird was much paler, not at all blotchy, and with a very well defined and contrasting underwing pattern. “Not a Honey Buzzard then?” queried Gordon.

“Long tail”, “Smallish, cuckoo-shaped head”, “Rounded wing tips”, “Dark carpal patches”, “Two dark tail bands”, “Prominent black border around primaries and secondaries”, “Flat-winged, not V-shaped”, “Very striking contrasting patterns underneath” were various comments from Tony, Roger and Gordon as Roger clicked away with his long lens camera and the bird drifted out of sight.

In the strong sunlight Roger enlarged a few of the black dots on the back of his camera but at the time, although we realised we would get a positive id from these images on the big screen, in the field we still couldn’t be 100% certain of what we’d seen owing to the light and our knowledge without the reference material.

Later that afternoon, Roger processed the images on his computer and it became very clear to all of us that this was an adult male Honey Buzzard, the images showing even more distinguishing features than we picked up in the field, even down to the yellow eye!. This would appear to be the fifth record for this species in the last 25 years for Moor Green Lakes and almost certainly the first photographed.

Not a true buzzard, the Honey Buzzard is a scarce summer visitor from Africa coming to breed in this country, mainly feeding on bee and wasp grubs. The RSPB estimates between 33 and 69 breeding pairs each year. Known nest sites are generally kept secret to avoid predation by egg collectors.

(The photograph on the front page of the Newsletter is of this bird, by Roger Milligan).